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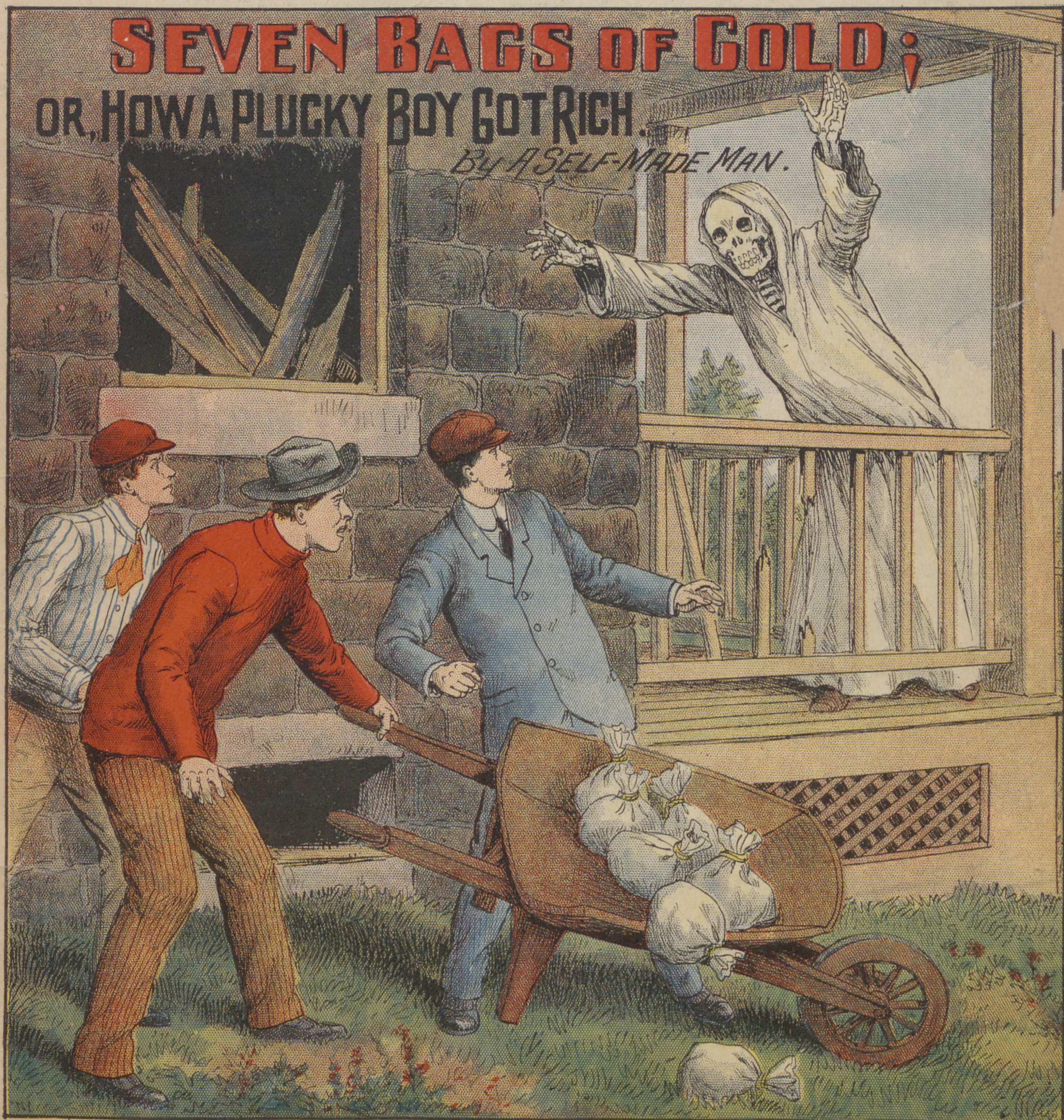
STORIES OF

BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

SEVEN BAGS OF GOLD;

OR, HOW A PLUCKY BOY GOT RICH.

By A SELF-MADE MAN.



There came a wild yell from the apparition on the balcony. The boy with the wheelbarrow dropped the handles, and it turned over, spilling the seven bags of gold on the ground. Joe's two companions were terribly frightened.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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PRICE 5 CENTS.

Seven Bags of Gold

OR,

HOW A PLUCKY BOY GOT RICH

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I

A STRENUOUS RESCUE

"I wonder if the chap who gave me the job of taking this bundle to its address took me for a pack-horse?" growled Joe Eastwood, dropping a heavy package on the sidewalk up against an iron railing, seating himself on it and fanning his face with his soft hat. "A nice job of a hot summer afternoon, and the foxy old rooster never said I'd have nearly a mile to walk after I got off the car. This errand is worth a dollar, and all I'm to get is fifty cents when I bring back the receipt. I wonder how much further I've got to go? Here comes a boy. I'll ask him. He looks as if he belongs around here."

The newcomer was a small, poorly dressed and gaunt-looking boy.

He plodded toward Joe with the air of one who had no particular interest in life.

"Say," hailed Joe, "can you tell me where Oak street is?"

The youth stopped and looked at him curiously.

"Next to Poplar street," he answered.

"Where is Poplar street?"

"Next to Oak street," grinned the boy.

"You're awfully funny, aren't you?" said Joe with a look of disgust. "Why can't you direct a fellow? I'm a stranger in this neighborhood, and I've got to deliver this package at a house in Oak street. Have I got much further to walk?"

"Gimme a nickel and I'll tell you."

"There's nothing mercenary about 'you, is there?"

"What's that?"

"Don't you know what mercenary means?"

"No."

"Better look the word up in a dictionary then. I can't afford to give away nickels. I'm nearly strapped."

"Good-by," said the youth, starting to move on.

"Hold on! Why can't you tell me where Oak street is?"

"I want a nickel, that's why."

"You look as if you wanted a square meal more than a nickel."

"That's what I want the nickel for. I've got a dime I've been saving for a month, and I need fifteen cents for a square meal."

"Haven't you had a square meal for a month?"

"No, not for six months."

"I guess you're coddling me. Are you hungry?"

"Am I? Don't I look it?"

"Rather. Don't you get enough to eat at home?"

"Home!"

As the youth uttered the word he looked solemn.

"Where do you live?" asked Joe in an interested tone.

"With my master."

"And he doesn't feed you well?"

"He says I'm a glutton."

"Oh, that's it?" laughed Joe.

"I had one potato, a piece of meat so big, one slice of bread, a piece of cheese with a hole in it and a small apple for my dinner. Am I a glutton?"

"Hardly. Well, I'll give you a nickel—that's half of my capital—if you'll direct me to Oak street."

"I'll do it. Hand it over."

Joe tossed the coin to him.

"My, what a dinner I'll have!" cried the youth, looking at the coin. "First I'll have some soup——"

"Cut it out and tell me where Oak street is."

"After the soup I'll have some beef a la mode, and then I'll top off with rice puddin'. Lord, how hungry I am!"

"Are you going to direct me?"

"Yep. Who do you want to find in Oak street?"

Joe got off the package and looked at the address.

"Matthew Graves, No. 16 Oak street."

"That's my master."

"Is that so?"

"Yep. Wait here till I go to the grocery and I'll take you to the house."

"You'll surely be back?" said Joe, half suspiciously.

"Of course I will, in five minutes. I'm only going to the corner."

"All right. I'll be here when you get back."

The youth plodded off at his former gait and Joe waited.

Six or seven minutes later the boy returned with several small packages.

"Where did you come from?" he asked Joe.

"Flushing," replied Joe, picking up his bundle.

"What's your name?"

"Joe Eastwood. What's yours?"

"Jerry Abbott."

"You work for Mr. Graves?"

"Yep. Who do you work for?"

"Nobody. I'm looking for a job."

"Can you keep books?"

"You mean account books?"

"Yep."

"Yes, I know something about bookkeeping, but I'm not an expert."

"My master wants a clerk."

"Does he? Why do you call him your master? Why don't you say your boss?"

"'Cause he owns me," replied the boy solemnly.

"Owns you! What do you mean by that?"

"He took me off the poor farm and signed a paper agreein' to keep me till I was twenty-one."

"Oh, I see. He has a claim on your services till you come of age. I suppose he doesn't pay you anything—just gives you your board and clothes."

"He don't half board me, and I never get any clothes except what Miss Edith gets for me on the quiet."

"Who is Miss Edith?"

"She's his daughter. My, but she's pretty! And she treats me fine. If it wasn't for her I'd run away."

"How old is she?"

"Dunno. Maybe as old as you, maybe not."

"So her father wants a clerk? I wouldn't mind trying the job if I could get it."

"You can get it if you ask for it. Nobody around here wants it."

"That doesn't speak well for it. Doesn't he pay enough?"

"That isn't it."

"What do you mean?"

"There's been seven clerks at the house since I've been there."

"Well?"

"Every one of them disappeared mysteriously."

"Disappeared mysteriously!" exclaimed Joe, astonished.

"Yes, with a bag of gold."

"Oh, come now. What are you giving me?"

"It's the truth. Everybody in the village calls my master a Bluebeard."

"Because he had seven clerks who all stole a bag of gold from him?" said Joe, who didn't believe a word of Jerry's story.

"No. Because they all disappeared mysteriously."

"Pooh! It's natural for a person who steals anything of value to get away, if he can, without anybody seeing him. I guess you're giving me taffy about those seven bags of gold. Any person who can lose seven bags of gold and not go into bankruptcy must be rich. How big were those bags?"

"About so big," replied Jerry.

"A bag that size would easily hold \$10,000. So your boss has lost \$70,000 in gold, and he hasn't the least idea where any of the bags are gone, eh?"

Joe thought the story too ridiculous for anything.

"That's what he says."

"Oh, he says so. Is that the only evidence there is that he lost the money?"

"I know he lost the money, because every time a clerk disappeared he went on like mad over the loss of another bag."

"When did the last clerk disappear mysteriously?"

"Last week."

"He was the seventh clerk and the seventh bag disappeared with him?"

"Yep."

"What does his daughter say about these mysterious disappearances—of clerks and bags of gold?"

"She doesn't know what to make out of it."

"Does she believe her father has lost seven bags of gold?"

"She says she knows he has. I heard her tell several persons so."

"Haven't the police been able to find any trace of the clerks or the gold?"

"Nope. There's his house," said the youth, pointing. Joe looked across the way and saw a large, old-fashioned building that looked as if it had been built a great many years since.

It was surrounded by a high stone wall in which there was a big iron carriage gate, with a small iron gate close to it.

The house stood in the center of a lawn that was poorly looked after.

It had many gables, and at one corner, overlooking a creek that connected with the Sound, it was circular in shape, rising into a turret.

This part was covered with ivy and had a very ancient appearance.

Jerry pulled a large iron key from his pocket, opened the side gate and he and Joe entered the grounds.

"Shall I go to the front door?" he asked.

"Yep. I'll go around and let you in and then I'll tell master you want to see him," said Jerry.

As Joe walked up to the front door a shrill, girlish shriek rang out on the air from around the corner of the house.

A moment later a young and beautiful girl dashed into sight and came running frantically toward the boy.

"Save me, oh, save me!" she cried in a terrified tone as her eyes rested on Joe.

As the words left her mouth a ferocious looking dog came tearing around the corner after her.

There was fury in his eyes and he seemed bent on business.

CHAPTER II

JOE ACCEPTS A CLERKSHIP

Girl and dog reached Joe almost together, and the boy had little time to consider what to do under the strenuous circumstances.

As the young lady fell almost at his feet, with a cry of acute terror, Joe, on the spur of the moment, swung the heavy package in his arms and dashed it squarely in the animal's face.

The dog was in the act of leaping at the moment and he went down in a heap, momentarily stunned.

Joe judged that he would recover in a minute or so, and that unless he could follow up the advantage he had gained serious consequences were likely to take place.

He looked around for something to put the dog out of business with.

A heavy flower pot stood near.

He seized it and brought it down on the animal's head just as he was beginning to kick and show other signs of returning animation.

The flower pot landed on the dog's head with a crash, and the animal, after one spasmodic kick, rolled over and lay still, with blood flowing from its red jaws.

The pot was wrecked, but it had done excellent service.

"You're quite safe now, miss," said Joe, taking the fair girl by the arm and assisting her on her feet.

She looked at the dead brute and shuddered.

Then she turned a pair of glorious blue eyes on her rescuer.

"How shall I ever be able to thank you enough?" she said earnestly. "You saved my life, for I never could have escaped him."

"You are welcome, miss," replied Joe, who surmised that the girl was Matthew Graves' daughter. "I did the best I could, and more by luck than anything else I managed to lay the brute out. I see there is a piece of chain hanging from his collar, so I suppose he broke loose from the place where he was fastened."

"Yes. He was a powerful dog and had a habit of tugging at his chain. My father bought him last week to guard the grounds at night, as our other dog was found poisoned on the morning father's last clerk disappeared with a bag of money. May I ask you what fortunate circumstance brought you here in the nick of time to save me?"

"I came here to deliver that package to your father," replied Joe, pointing at the somewhat demoralized bundle.

"How did you get in? We always keep the gate locked."

"Your father's boy, Jerry, admitted me and then went around to let me into the house by the front door. There he is now."

"I must go and tell my father what you have done for me, and he will thank you, too, for your plucky aid," she said.

"I am satisfied with your thanks, Miss Graves," said Joe, regarding her with an admiring eye.

"But my father will wish to thank you, too," she replied with a smile. "At any rate, you want to see him to deliver your package. I will tell him."

She tripped up the steps to the front door and Joe followed her with his bundle.

"Wait here in the hall till I come back," she said, and then she ran up stairs with the lightness of a fawn.

"What happened out in front?" asked Jerry. "I thought I heard Miss Edith scream."

"She did scream. The watch dog chased her around to the porch."

"How could he when he's chained up?" asked Jerry, apparently astonished.

"He broke his chain."

"Oh, Lord! Where is he now? He's a fierce dog. I won't dare go outside till somebody catches him."

"Don't worry about him. I put him out of business."

"What did you do to him?" asked Jerry with a look of wonder, for the very sight of the animal was a terror to him.

"I broke his head with a big flower pot."

"You did!" cried the youth, looking at Joe as if he was something more than human.

"Go outside and look at him. He's lying on the walk. He's let out his last yelp, and all he's good for now is the sausage factory."

"My master will be as mad as a hornet when he hears about it."

"Will he? Not if he thinks more of his daughter than the dog. I had to lay out the brute to save her, and I was lucky to do it," said Joe.

"I don't see how you did it, anyway."

"Go and look at him and maybe you'll understand."

At that moment the girl appeared at the head of the stairs.

"Come up," she said to Joe.

The boy shouldered his package and mounted the stairs.

The girl led him into a back room fitted up like a combined library and office.

Its general aspect was dingy, for the old-fashioned, paneled walls and the ceiling were dark and somber through age.

It sadly needed whitening and a coat or two of paint.

The furniture consisted of an old-time desk of solid mahogany; a very ancient, square iron safe that a modern burglar could have opened in a jiffy; several stiff back chairs; a solid-looking sofa; a small table on which stood a lamp of antique design; half a dozen faded portraits on the walls; a carpet that had long since outlived its usefulness, so threadbare was it; a good-sized mahogany book-

case filled with rare and out-of-print books, and many ornaments of value.

In the center of the room stood a prematurely aged man.

He wore a dressing gown and had slippers on his feet.

This was Matthew Graves, and he looked more like the grandfather of the girl he called daughter than her father.

Joe dropped his package and bowed as the girl introduced him to her father as the boy who had saved her from being torn and probably killed by the watch dog.

"I thank you, young man, for the service you rendered my daughter," he said in measured tones, "and regret that my poverty prevents me from rewarding you as you deserve."

"I don't ask for any reward, sir. I am sufficiently repaid in knowing that I saved your daughter from serious injury," replied Joe.

The girl flashed a look of gratitude and interest at him.

"What is your name, young man?" asked Graves, regarding the boy curiously.

"Joe Eastwood."

"You brought a package for me, I understand?"

"Yes, sir; there it is. Here is the receipt you are to sign for it."

Graves took the paper.

"You are employed by Mr. Baxter, I suppose?"

"No, sir. I am not lucky enough to be employed at present."

"Are you well educated?"

"I've been through a grammar school in New York, and I took a course in a business night school and know something about bookkeeping and other——"

"Then you are fitted for a clerk?"

"Yes, sir. I think I could fill the bill if I could get such a position."

"I need a clerk. How would you like to——"

"No, no, father!" exclaimed the girl in an anxious tone. Joe looked at her in surprise.

"Tush! tush!" said the old man impatiently. "I like his face. I will employ him if he is willing to accept the low wages I offer. He will board here with us of course."

"But father——"

"Be silent," replied Matthew Graves with a touch of sternness. "Hark you, young man, I will give you five dollars a week and your keep to act as my clerk."

The girl shook her head vigorously at Joe for him to decline the offer, but he was so eager to get a position that he did not notice her.

"I'll take it, sir, and do my best," he replied.

The girl looked disappointed and anxious.

"I believe you are honest," went on the old man.

"I hope so, sir. I have never yet been guilty of a dishonest action."

"It is well. Seven clerks have I had during the last year, and each of them robbed me of a bag of gold and fled in the night," said the old man solemnly.

"Do you keep your money in that safe?" asked Joe.

"I do."

"And you hold the key yourself; don't you?"

"Surely."

"How then could they rob you, unless, of course, they managed to steal the key in some way?"

"I know not their methods, but this I do know—they robbed me of my gold and fled."

"I don't see how seven of them could have worked the same trick on you," said Joe, clearly puzzled to account for such a remarkable series of thefts.

"Nevertheless it was done. Seven of them robbed me. I pray, young man, that you may not be the eighth."

"You needn't worry about that. I wouldn't take your money if you left it in my charge and I knew all I had to do was to walk out of the gate with it. There is nothing gained by dishonesty," replied Joe earnestly.

"Well, well then, so be it. As long as you touch not my gold, but do your business well we shall get on well together. But stay, are you a large eater?"

"I have a pretty healthy appetite as a rule," replied Joe in some surprise.

"I regret to hear it. My household expenses are great and vex me much. My boy of all work, Jerry Abbott, is a veritable glutton. He does nothing but eat, eat, eat all day long. I took him from the poor farm, but I fear I made a bad bargain. I must keep him, for I signed an agreement to provide for him till he reaches his twenty-first birthday. I am sadly afraid that he will eat me out of house and home before that time."

"I met him in the street a short distance from here, and he guided me to your house. He does not look like a glutton, for he's as thin as a rail and has a half-starved look," said Joe.

"His looks belie him. He eats as much as two boys ought to. He is not satisfied with what I allow him—a pound of good, wholesome meat a week, two large potatoes per day, a slice of bread at each meal and a small pudding on Sunday. Is not that enough for a growing boy?"

Joe looked at the old man's daughter rather doubtfully, but her eyes were cast down on the floor.

The boy noticed, however, that she did not look as if she suffered from want of proper food, for she was plump and healthy looking.

This fact rather encouraged him.

"Well, sir," he said, "if you are willing to give me a trial, I will return with that receipt to Mr. Badger, collect my pay for bringing it here, and then go to the house where I have been stopping, get my grip and return here either to-night or in the morning."

"Come to-night, for I shall want you to watch my gold."

"Watch your gold!" exclaimed Joe, surprised. "Isn't it secure in that safe?"

"I dare not leave the safe ungarded for a moment. Are you a light sleeper?"

"I don't think it's necessary to discharge a cannon alongside my head to awaken me, sir."

"'Tis well. Guard my gold well, and rob me not, and we shall be good friends—good friends," and muttering to himself, he walked to his desk, took up some papers that were on it and proceeded to examine them, apparently oblivious of the presence of Joe and his daughter in the room.

The boy looked at him narrowly.

A suspicion was beginning to creep into his mind that the old man was not altogether right in his upper story, and he began to think that the job of clerk to Matthew Graves might not be so desirable as he had figure on.

CHAPTER III

JOE AND EDITH

As he stood hesitating what course he should pursue the girl walked up to him, touched him on the arm and whispered, "Come."

He followed her out of the room and down stairs to the hall door, which she opened and they passed out on the stoop.

"There now, your father forgot to sign that receipt, and I can't go back without it," said Joe.

"Wait here and I will return with it," she said, darting inside.

Joe employed the interval in looking over the grounds of the place within the wall as far as they came within his range of vision.

He saw that great, rusty iron spikes ornamented the wall at close intervals and that the gate was too high to be climbed except at some risk.

"Well, if seven different clerks sneaked over that wall with a heavy bag of gold in their possession they were mighty clever chaps," thought the boy. "It does not strike me that more than two of them could accomplish that successfully, though I'm willing to admit that a thief will dare a whole lot to get away with a bag of gold worth \$10,000. The idea that seven could have worked that trick with success is what gets me. It doesn't seem reasonable. I must question Miss Edith about it. If she says it is so, I'm willing to take her word for it. I don't believe she'd tell me an untruth. She doesn't look like that kind of girl. The old man's actions and talk were so peculiar that I doubt if I'd come back and take the job if it was not for Miss Edith. She's a mighty pretty girl, and I might as well admit that I'm a bit gone on her. I'm willing to put up with considerable to be under the same roof with her."

The return of the young lady with the receipt, which she handed to him, cut short his soliloquy, and he followed her toward the gate.

"I'm sorry that you accepted my father's offer," said Edith as they walked along the path.

"Why?" he asked. "Don't you care to have me around?"

"It isn't that," she replied earnestly. "I would be glad to see you often, because—well, because I like you, and you have saved me from a great danger. It is for that reason that I did not want you to engage yourself to my father."

"That's a strange kind of reasoning, Miss Graves. Five dollars a week and my board and lodging means a whole lot to me now, for I'm practically broke. I really don't know where I could get the price of my room and meals for another week."

"Are you really so bad off as that?"

"I am."

"I shouldn't have thought so from your appearance. You are neatly dressed and——"

"Appearances are often deceptive."

"Have you no home or parents?"

"I am sorry to say I have not. My father has been dead

five years. My mother died a few months ago, and her death left me to shift for myself."

"I am so sorry," she said sympathetically.

"Well, it can't be helped. If I'd had ordinary luck I could have done better, but everything in the way of a job has gone back on me, and so when your father made his offer I jumped at it."

"I don't wonder," she said and was silent for a moment or two. "Well, perhaps it is for the best for us all that you should come here. My father has had seven clerks, who, after a certain length of time, disappeared and with each of them went a bag of gold."

"Do you believe they took his money?"

"As far as I can judge by appearances they did. After each clerk disappeared I know there was one bag of gold less in the safe."

"Your father must be wealthy to have had so much money in gold."

"He is worth more than I have any idea of. I know that at this moment he has seven bags of gold in his safe."

"Seven bags!" exclaimed Joe. "What is the amount of money in each?"

"Ten thousand dollars exactly."

"Just what I figured. Were the stolen bags of the same size?"

"Yes. Each contained exactly ten thousand dollars."

"That would make \$140,000 altogether. Why didn't he keep that money in a bank where it would be safe?"

"I have tried to get him to do it, but he will not. He wants it all within his reach, so he can count it whenever the humor is on him. He lives largely for his gold."

"Then I should think that the loss of one bag, not speaking of seven, would have broken his heart."

"He looks much older since he lost his money, and I notice that he acts queerer and queerer every day almost."

"He had fourteen bags of gold in the safe, I suppose, when the first was stolen," said Joe.

"Yes, for I have seen them there. Each night the clerk had to take the bags out of the safe, count them in my father's presence, and put them back, acknowledging the number. Each morning the same thing was done, and the bags checked off. In the case of each clerk this formula was gone through with for different lengths of time before he failed to come to breakfast one morning, and then when my father opened the safe in my presence another bag of gold was found to be missing."

"Gee! That beats the Dutch. Your father locked the safe the night before after having the bags counted. Next morning you say he found the safe still locked, and on examination there was a bag of gold gone—just one bag. And the clerk was gone, too, and never a clue to show how he left the house. Does this spiked fence go all around the grounds?"

"It does."

"And did you always keep a watch dog roaming about at night?"

"Yes, but the night the seventh clerk disappeared the dog was poisoned. He was found dead next morning."

"But no such thing happened in the case of the other six?"

"No."

"With a savage dog and a spiked fence to buck against

I don't see how those clerks ever got away in the dead of night without making a sound."

"Neither do I. It is a great mystery."

"Where did the clerks sleep?"

"On the sofa in the room where you saw my father."

"I suppose he'll expect me to sleep there, too?"

"He will. During the intervals when he has had no clerk he has slept there himself. He always fears that some thief will break in and steal all of his money in a lump, therefore he will not leave the room untenanted by somebody for a moment."

"Those clerks couldn't have opened the safe and re-locked it again without a key. Do you suppose they could have gone to your father's room and taken it out of his pocket while he slept?"

"No, for I am sure I would have heard them. My room is on the corridor next to his, and I am a light sleeper. Besides, if they had done so, they must have returned it after abstracting a single bag. Why should they have taken all that trouble? What had they to gain by it? Nothing but the added risk of discovery."

"That's right. The more we discuss this thing the deeper the mystery grows. By the way, how did he secure these seven clerks?"

"By advertising in a New York paper."

"Say, a light strikes me, suggested by the singularity of the thefts. Maybe the whole thing is an organized conspiracy on the part of a clique of crooks. They might watch for his advertisement in the paper, and one of them at a time applies for the position. Securing the job, he works himself into the confidence of your father, and when he thinks the time is ripe he takes a bag of gold, leaving the balance for another pal to sample later on. Thus they rob your father systematically, and at the same time throw an air of mystery around their operations. What do you think about it?"

"It is possible. The idea has never occurred to me."

"It's the only solution I can figure out. It is almost ridiculous to believe that seven clerks, all independent of and strangers to each other, should work exactly alike and with equal success, while it is equally unheard of to think that out of seven employees not one was honest enough to resist temptation," said Joe.

"Your suggestion seems very reasonable," said Edith thoughtfully. "My remark that maybe it was for the best that you should come to work for my father was due to my conviction that you, at least, would not steal my father's gold, and that possibly you and I might be able to find out the mystery of the disappearance of the seven clerks and the stolen gold."

"We might," replied Joe, "but if they really got away with the money we are not likely to find it. Well, it is time I made a start if I'm to get back here to-night with my things, as your father told me to do. It's a mile from here to the trolley track, and Flushing is quite a distance away."

"There's bell handle on the outside of the gate," said the girl. "Ring it when you arrive and Jerry will let you in."

"All right," said Joe. "Good-by till I see you again."

Then he started for the trolley road, taking his bearings as he went so that he might have no difficulty in finding the house when he returned.

CHAPTER IV.

SEVEN BAGS OF GOLD.

On his way back to Flushing Joe pondered over the singular and mysterious facts connected with the old house on Oak street which promised to be his scene of action for a while to come.

The disappearance of the old man's seven clerks and the seven missing bags of gold puzzled him not a little.

To say the truth, he did not put much stock in the ingenious theory he had advanced to Edith to account for the astonishing state of affairs.

If crooks had learned of Matthew Graves' wealth and had planned to rob him, it did not strike him that they would make a piecemeal job of the matter.

Once they got at the contents of the safe they would have taken the fourteen bags while they were about it.

"There is something out of the common back of this matter—something that will stand a sharp investigation. I should think the old man would have hired an expert detective to ferret out the mystery. Of course he may have done so for all I know to the contrary, but I rather doubt it. His daughter is very anxious to find out the truth of the matter, which is quite natural, and I'll help her all I can, for she's a mighty fine girl. It's my opinion her father is a bit light in the head. While he talked sane enough, there was something odd about him. That may be due to worry over his lost gold. A man worth \$70,000 in money at least, and owner of his own house, has no call to bother about the amount of food his small household consumes. One would think from the way he put it that he was forced to skimp owing to lack of funds to pay his current expenses. Well, I don't mean to be starved out, and judging from the appearance of his daughter, I don't think there is any danger of a food famine. It is true that Jerry has a famished look and claims that he is not half fed, but I guess he is one of those chaps whose appetite is never satisfied, and who couldn't get fat to save his life because he doesn't run that way."

When Joe reached Flushing he handed the receipt to Mr. Baxter and collected his fifty cents, half of which he immediately expended on his dinner, after which he went to his lodgings, told his landlady that he had secured a job in the village of Rye, packed up his few belongings in his grip and started on his return to the village.

On the car he got into conversation with a man who lived in Rye.

"By the way, I suppose you know an old man in Rye named Matthew Graves?" said Joe, who thought he'd try and find out something about the man he was going to live with.

"Yes, I ought to know him. He's lived there a great many years in an old mansion which was built before the Revolutionary War. It's one of the show places of the village, but nobody is admitted within the tall, spiked

wall which hedges in the grounds unless he goes there on business."

"What sort of man is Matthew Graves?"

"He's a recluse and has the reputation of being a miser."

"What kind of business does he carry on? It must amount to something, for he employs a clerk."

"He lends money out on bond and mortgage and on other security. There is some mystery about his clerks. He has had seven different ones within a year. All have come from New York in answer to his advertisement. All of them left suddenly—I might say disappeared, for they were not seen to leave the village—and he has claimed that each of them robbed him of a bag of gold. That he should have lost seven bags of money, one after the other, at the hands of seven different clerks, does not look reasonable, and nobody in the village believes the story. It is quite probable that he may have lost one bag, but he isn't the kind of man, in my opinion who would lose the second one."

"Then you think his statement rather fishy?"

"I certainly do."

"But there must have been some reason for the clerks decamping so mysteriously. That of itself would cast suspicion on them."

"That is true, but their disappearance may be due to some other reason."

"What other reason?"

"I couldn't tell you. When Graves reported the loss of his first bag of gold and the disappearance of his clerk, Constable Brown, knowing that the clerk came from New York City, reported the matter to the police authorities of that city, but nothing ever came from it. A month later the old man reported the loss of a second bag and the vanishing of another clerk. Brown was rather astonished, as were the people of the village, who soon heard about it. The constable went to New York this time and made a strenuous effort to run the clerk down in conjunction with the city detectives. They met with no success. When Brown came back he advised Graves to put his gold in the village bank and thus put temptation out of the way of his next clerk. He wouldn't do it, and inside of five weeks he reported the loss of his third bag and the disappearance of his third clerk. Brown didn't know what to think. He went all through the old mansion and all over the grounds, hunting for a clue, but none could he find. He reported the theft again to the New York police, and a metropolitan detective came down and nosed around for several days. The village was much worked up over the singular thefts, and little else was talked about for some time. The alleged absconder was not heard from—he had vanished as mysteriously as the other two. The excitement had hardly died out before Graves reported the loss of his fourth bag and the disappearance of another clerk in the same way as his predecessors. That settled the matter with the constable. He told the old man that this was carrying things too far, that he didn't believe he had been robbed, and that he had something else to do than to lose his time over imaginary thefts. We all thought as the constable did. In fact, none of us now believed that Graves had ever lost any money at all. Since then it has been reported about the village that Graves claims he has lost four additional bags and that four other clerks have disappeared just like

the other three. The result is, it is the opinion of the village that Graves is a monomaniac—that is, partially deranged, or, in other words, is laboring under the hallucination that he has been robbed seven times. It will not surprise us if we hear that he has been robbed seven times more in the course of another year."

"But how about the seven clerks?" asked Joe.

"Well, there is no doubt about his having seven different clerks and that they left his employ rather mysteriously," admitted the Rye man, "but as the clerks were strangers to us we have not bothered greatly about their disappearance, concluding that they became dissatisfied with their job and left under cover of night, which they could easily do without any one noticing them."

"Mr. Graves had a daughter," said Joe.

"Yes, a very nice girl. She is seldom seen outside her father's grounds. For some reason, possibly because her father has forbidden her, she shows no desire to make friends with the neighbors."

"I was talking with her this afternoon."

"Where did you meet her? She has never been known to leave the village."

"On her father's grounds."

"Why, were you in Rye this afternoon?"

"I was. I carried a package from a man in Flushing to her father."

"Are you going back to see Graves again to-night?"

"I am. He has hired me as his clerk—the eighth this year, he calls me."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the man in surprise. "I can't say that I envy you the job. I hope you won't disappear mysteriously with the eighth bag of gold," he added with a laugh.

"No fear of that. I mean to serve him faithfully and also try to find out, if possible, just how my seven predecessors left the place. I don't like mysteries, so it is my purpose to unravel this one."

"You'll find that the old man is crazy on the subject of his bags of gold. It is probable that the first clerk robbed him of a bag of gold and disappeared during the night without leaving any trace of his flight behind him. The loss of that bag of gold has doubtless preyed on his mind and periodically gives birth to the idea that he has been robbed again in the same identical way."

"I wouldn't be surprised but you are right, though his daughter has told me that each time a clerk disappeared a bag of gold was missing from the safe."

"Does she know that to be a fact?" asked the man in some surprise.

"She does."

"No one will accuse her of not being right in the mind," said the Rye man. "Did she explain to you how she knew it?"

"She did, but as the information was confidential I could not repeat it."

"Did it seem reasonable to you?"

"Yes."

"If there was more than one bag of money in the safe, as your words would imply, how is it that only one bag was stolen?"

"I couldn't tell you. That is one of the singular features of the case."

"Has she any idea of the manner in which the clerks took their departure?"

"She has not. Their disappearance has puzzled her as much as it is supposed to have surprised her father."

"Well," said the man, scratching his head, "I hope you will have better luck than your seven predecessors. If you stay I should like to see you occasionally to learn what you have found out. I will give you my name and address."

He wrote it down and handed it to Joe.

The car was now entering the village, and they both alighted together at a corner, and the man, whose name was Andrew Johnson, went part of the way with Joe.

It was ten o'clock when Joe rang the bell at the Graves mansion.

Presently Jerry Abbott appeared and peered at him through the bars of the gate.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" he said. "I thought maybe you wasn't coming."

He unlocked the gate and admitted Joe.

"Come around the back way," said Jerry. "Miss Edith is waiting for you in the dining-room."

Joe followed the lean youth and was first introduced into a large, low-ceiled kitchen, when he saw a stout woman sitting at a table reading a newspaper in the light of a lamp.

"Cookie," said Jerry, "this is Joe Eastwood, master's new clerk."

The woman looked hard at the boy, evidently sizing him up.

Joe's frank, honest and good-looking face seemed to strike her favorably.

"How do you do?" she said. "Miss Edith is in the next room."

She pointed at a door, and Joe passed through it into another large, low-ceiled room, which was clearly the dining-room.

There he saw the girl reading a book.

She put it down the moment she saw him, rose and advanced with a smile to meet him.

"I was half afraid you had changed your mind about coming," she said.

"Half afraid, eh?" smiled Joe, "and yet at first you didn't want me to come."

"I know it, but I am in hopes nothing will happen to you."

"You mean that you trust I won't disappear mysteriously with a bag of your father's gold?"

"I am sure you never will touch his money," she replied earnestly.

"Thank you for that expression of your confidence. You may be sure I will not. I would not forfeit your good opinion for a thousand bags of gold."

She blushed vividly under his ardent gaze.

"Come. My father has been asking for you several times. I fear he is growing impatient. Let us go to him."

She led the way up stairs to the room Joe was in before.

Matthew Graves was seated at his desk poring over a mortgage.

He looked up when his daughter and Joe entered the room.

"You have come at last, young man. It is well. I have been waiting for you. Retire, my child. I would speak to my new clerk in private," he said.

Edith looked a bit anxious, but did not dare to linger after her father's command.

"Young man, have you met any of the villagers on your way here?" asked Graves.

"I rode from Flushing with one, sir, by the name of Andrew Johnson."

"You conversed with him on the way, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You told him, I suppose, that I had hired you as my clerk?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he, I dare say, told you of the unaccountable disappearance of the other seven clerks, each of whom robbed me of a bag of gold."

"I admit that he told me all about the reports you made to the constable concerning at least three of the seven."

"And the other four?"

"He said it was known throughout the village that you claim to have been robbed seven times of a bag of gold in exactly the same manner."

"Claim to have been robbed!" exclaimed the old man angrily. "I have been robbed. Seven bags of gold have I lost. Seven, d'ye understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied Joe, who was pretty well satisfied that Graves believed he had been robbed of the seven bags whether he had been or not.

"These people doubt me, but what do they know? What do they care? It was not their gold that vanished. Young man, you may have heard that I am selfish, usurious, a hoarder up of money—this, no doubt, is the opinion the villagers have of me, and perhaps they are right, but what I am the world has made me. I have been the prey of designing rascals. In years past they dragged me to the rugged brink of ruin by their tricks of high finance, and having plundered me of all cast me on my own resources like a sponge that has been squeezed dry. This froze my heart to all mankind, and since then I have had but one object in life, and that was to make a new fortune and then use it to revenge myself on those who beggared me. I have succeeded well—very well," he went on with a wicked grin. "In yonder safe are bonds and mortgages and other securities on which I have loaned these men thousands of dollars. When the time comes they will not be able to pay, but will ask for more time. Will I grant it? Will a famished tiger refuse a delicate meal? Will the graveyard give up its dead? No. And that will be my answer to them. As music is to the cultivated ear so will their pleadings for time be to mine. I will gloat over their troubles. I will—but there, this is nothing to you. You cannot understand. I am hard and relentless to those who have wronged me, but to those who do the right thing by me I am generous beyond their most sanguine hopes. I have agreed to give you five dollars a week to serve me. Do it faithfully and I will make it ten, fifteen or even more. Only do not rob me, like the other seven. All else I might forgive, but if you rob me——"

He stopped and glared at Joe.

"Oh, Lord," thought the boy, "he's crazy as a March

hare. I don't wonder that the seven clerks threw up their jobs and skipped out in the night. I dare say he's worse at night than at any other time."

At that moment Edith appeared with a lighted lamp in her hand.

"Dear father, it is time you retired to your room," she said. "You have not slept in your own bed since your last clerk went away. It is going on midnight."

"I will come directly, child," he replied. "Young man, I will show you the gold you are to watch over."

He walked to the safe and unlocked it with a key which he took from his pocket, and Joe saw that the key was attached to a ring and that the ring was at the end of a small steel chain secured to the old man's clothing.

Throwing open the door, he exposed the interior, which had pigeon-holes filled with packages of papers, and a large space in the center in which rested seven bags apparently full of money.

"Take out those bags, place them on the table and count them," he said.

Joe did so.

"How many do you make them?"

"There are seven," said Joe.

"Exactly. Yet once there were fourteen. But seven times have I been robbed of a bag by a clerk on whom I depended. Replace them in the safe."

Joe obeyed.

"You are sure there are seven bags of gold in the safe, eh?"

"I am sure there are seven bags of money, and I'll take your word for it that it is gold."

"'Tis well. Now I will lock the door. There, all is secure. Come, my child, we will go to bed. 'Tis near midnight, you say?"

"Good night, Mr. Eastwood," said Edith, offering Joe her hand.

"Good night, Miss Graves."

"In yonder closet you will find all you need to make yourself comfortable on the sofa."

"All right. I guess I won't suffer, for it's a pretty warm night."

"Your arm, my daughter," said Matthew Graves. "Remember, young man, there are seven bags of gold in that safe that you are responsible for. Let it be so found in the morning."

"You'll find them there all right."

"I hope so—for your sake and mine," said the old man in a significant tone.

"I wonder what he means by that?" Joe asked himself as he watched his employer walk toward the door leaning on his daughter's arm.

As Edith opened the door leading on to the corridor Matthew Graves paused and turned around.

"Remember, young man, there are seven bags of gold under your care. Be watchful and do not yield to temptation and rob me. Let seven bags be found in the morning—seven, you understand!"

Then Edith and her father passed into the corridor, and Joe was left alone in the gloomy old room with its shadowy recollections of over one hundred years.

CHAPTER V.

AN OLD HOUSE.

"I don't think I fancy this job much," muttered Joe, walking to the window and looking out. "If it wasn't for Miss Edith, I don't think I'd stay. Her father is surely off his balance. He's got the seven bags of gold on the brain. I'd give something to find out where the other seven went. I'd be willing to bet that those clerks never took them. How could they unless they brought a small kit of burglar's tools with them? Well, he'll find his seven bags in the morning all right, for I'm not going to disappear with one to-night."

It was a fine moonlight night, and the waters of the Sound glistened in silvery radiance.

There was a light breeze blowing and Joe leaned out of the window to breathe it in, for the room was warm and stuffy.

"No thief could get in this window without the aid of a ladder, so I guess I won't be troubled with such visitors, at any rate not to-night. I don't mind sleeping on that sofa in this kind of weather, but I doubt if I'd care for it in winter," thought the boy after half closing the window.

He looked in the closet and found there all the bed clothes he cared to use.

He fixed up the sofa as comfortably as possible and then turning out the lamp he turned in for the night.

His situation was so strange, however, that he could not get to sleep.

For an hour or more he turned and twisted about and then, overcome at last by the fatigue of the day, he fell asleep.

His repose, however, was not a placid one, such as he was accustomed to.

Odd and fantastic dreams troubled his sleep, in all of which appeared seven figures which Joe seemed to recognize as the seven clerks who had in turn disappeared so mysteriously at the time when a bag of gold had vanished also.

They nodded at him and beckoned for him to join them.

Then they turned into seven grinning skeletons that danced a fantastic jig with hands joined, all the while staring at him with their eyeless sockets.

After that they vanished and Joe drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight.

The sun was shining slantingly in at the two windows, the birds were singing outside and a cool morning breeze was swaying the heavy curtains to and fro.

Joe sprang up, wondering what time it was.

A small modern clock on his employer's desk told him that it was half-past seven.

"It's late," he muttered, springing out of bed and hustling on his clothes.

There was a washstand in the roomy closet, and he washed himself and fixed his hair before a small mirror.

Then he folded up the bed clothes and placed them where he had found them.

Hardly had he finished when he heard a bell ring somewhere downstairs.

Presently he heard slow and measured steps in the corridor, the door opened and Matthew Graves walked into the room.

"Good morning, young man," he said in a friendly tone. "I hope you passed a pleasant night."

Joe thought of the seven clerks who had bothered a portion of his sleep, and wasn't certain about it, but nevertheless he replied that he had slept all right.

"Breakfast awaits you below," said the employer, walking to his desk.

"All right, sir. Do you wish me to assist you downstairs?"

"No. My breakfast is always served to me here. In fact, I take all my meals in this room, for the safe must never be left for a moment unguarded."

"He is certainly crazy on the subject of his money," thought Joe as he walked downstairs. "How could any one get into that safe while he's at breakfast?"

He found Edith in the dining-room waiting for him.

She greeted him with a smile and a cheerful good morning, which he turned, and taking her place at the head of the table, she pointed to a chair close to her.

The breakfast consisted of steak, fried potatoes, hot rolls and coffee, and Joe had no fault to find with it.

Edith saw that he was bountifully supplied, and she did not stint herself either.

"Judging from your father's remarks yesterday afternoon, I should imagine he would have a fit if he saw what a good breakfast we are having," laughed Joe.

"If I followed my father's orders, we would have very little to eat, and I would not be able to keep the cook," she replied. "To hear him talk, one would think we could not afford to buy enough of the necessities of life. You will find that such is not the case. I buy what I think is necessary, and he gives me the money to pay the bills at the end of the week. He never looks at them, but he never fails to tell me to be more economical. Poor father! He has changed greatly since he lost his first bag of gold. But I am sure with you in his employ he will lose no more."

"Not through me he won't," replied Joe, who then related such portions of his dream as he could remember.

"I do not believe that dreams mean anything," she replied. "Your mind was filled with thoughts of the seven clerks, and then seven missing bags of gold, so it was natural you should dream about them."

"I guess you're right. I'm not particularly surprised myself that I had such odd visions."

After breakfast Joe took a walk around the grounds with Edith for about an hour and at nine o'clock returned to the room where his employer was seated at his desk.

He found a chair and a writing table placed beside one of the windows.

There were writing materials on it.

Joe's first job was to copy a number of documents that Mr. Graves placed before him, and the task took him a couple of hours, during which the old man had one visitor, who wanted to raise a sum of money on his farm.

Joe worked steadily until one o'clock and he acquitted himself to the satisfaction of his employer.

The bell then rang for dinner, and he was told to go down to the dining-room.

The meal was a thoroughly good one, and the boy was now satisfied that there was no danger of any one in the household suffering from want of food.

Jerry evidently did not tell the truth when he said he had not had a square meal in six months.

Just why he looked so skinny and ill-fed was a problem to Joe.

After dinner Joe had an hour to himself and he spent it in Edith's company.

The more he saw of the girl the more she fascinated him, and it was clear that he was not displeasing to her.

He worked from half-past two until five and then he was off for the day.

On the whole the job was an easy one—what some people would call a "pipe," and he was glad he had fallen into it.

Supper was announced promptly at six, and when they were through Joe and Edith went down to the end of the grounds, passed outside the wall through a kind of postern gate, and strolled along the bank of the creek toward the Sound.

It was dark when they returned, and Joe passed the rest of the evening playing backgammon with the girl in the dining-room.

His sleep was not bothered that night with unpleasant dreams, and he awoke in the morning feeling quite chipper.

During the week that followed Joe and Edith had frequent conversations about the seven clerks and the seven bags of gold.

The girl showed him all over the house, excepting the big cellar, which occupied the whole of the foundations of the house, and was divided into compartments, one of which had originally been used as a wine bin.

"This is a pretty old house," said Joe one evening after he had been there a week.

"Yes. It was built one hundred and forty years ago," replied Edith.

"Gee! It's older than I thought. Is it haunted?" he grinned. "All old houses are, they say."

She looked serious at once.

"Did you notice the tower end—the part which is so thickly covered with ivy?" she said.

"Sure I did. It looks older than the rest of the place."

"It is. It is over two hundred years old."

"Is that so? How does it happen to be older than the rest of the place?"

"It is the only portion left of the original structure, which was destroyed by fire. It was not injured by the flames and the owner of the place let it stand when he rebuilt the rest, as you see, on more modern lines just before the Revolutionary War. He was a wealthy Tory and did not enjoy a very good reputation, so I have been told. In fact, I have heard many dark stories about him, which have been handed down in the families of the older residents of this village."

"They have been made up because he was a Tory. Tories, you know, were hated by the patriots because they sided with the British."

"Of course I can't say whether the stories about him were true or not, but they do say that his wife vanished in a mysterious way that led to an inquiry at the time; under

the impression that he had put her out of the way, as he had been heard to threaten to do. He was arrested on suspicion, at any rate, and the house was searched from cellar to roof for the lady's body, but it was not found, nor was any evidence discovered to connect him with her supposed murder."

"When did that happen?"

"Shortly after he rebuilt this house."

"What reason did he give for her disappearance?"

"He said that she eloped in the night with an army officer who was visiting them, and he had no idea where they went. He declared that he was glad to be rid of her, which accounted for his failure to make the slightest effort to go after the fugitives. His statement was not generally accepted as the truth, though it was known that the night she disappeared the army officer left for New York in a chaise. People said she was not the kind of lady to run away from her husband, notwithstanding that she led an unhappy life with him. The room my father uses for his office was her room, and she was last seen there by her maid on the night she disappeared."

"This is interesting," said Joe. "The last seen of each of the seven clerks was in that same room. I wonder if there is any connection between the incidents? How long have you and your father lived in this house?"

"Seven years."

"Your father, I understand, slept in that room when he had no clerk, and he did not disappear."

"Nobody has ever disappeared here since we came but the clerks."

"The clerks must have been hoodooed. I hope I won't follow their luckless example," said Joe with a smile.

"I trust you will not," she answered seriously.

"Why do you say that so seriously?"

"Because—because I wouldn't want anything to happen to you."

"Did you take as much interest in the other clerks?"

She blushed and looked at the carpet, leaving Joe to form his own conclusions.

"I'm not afraid of disappearing," he said after a short pause. "I'd much rather remain here than go away. I like the position. I am getting used to your father, and he does not seem half so queer to me as he did at first. Then I like you, too," he added earnestly. "I never met a girl before who pleased me so much, who seemed so sensible and nice as you. I hope I don't offend you by being so frank, but I can't help saying what is the truth. You're not offended, are you?"

"No," she replied in a low tone, while the color mounted higher in her face.

"I'm glad, for I wouldn't offend you for the world."

She continued silent, with her eyes bent on the floor.

There was a short pause, and then Joe, at a loss what to say next, returned to the subject of the house.

"You didn't answer the question I asked you when we first started to speak about this house," he said.

"What did you ask me?"

"I asked you if it was haunted, like so many old houses are said to be."

"They say the tower part is," she replied in a low tone.

"That's the oldest part. Ever see or hear anything there?" asked Joe with an air of interest.

"Never. I was only once in one of the two rooms, which are connected with a circular stairway, and I wouldn't go there alone, even in the daytime, for a good deal."

"Then you suspect that it is haunted?"

"I don't know anything about it. We don't use that part of the house, and never have. The entrance is at the end of the corridor near my father's office. It is a narrow door, the key to which is hanging from a nail beside it. When the agent showed us the house he opened the door for us to see what the old part looked like. He said it had not been used by the previous tenants and owners—two old maids, who had occupied the house for over forty years."

"Forty years! That's a long time to live in one house."

"The room seemed to be fully furnished in old-fashioned style, but everything was smothered in dust. We did not care to go upstairs to see what the other room looked like, and the agent could not tell us as he had never been up there. In fact, he did not seem particularly anxious to show us up."

"So there is one room in the house you have never seen?"

"Yes, but I have no curiosity to see it."

"I thought curiosity was one thing that a woman never went back on," laughed Joe.

"There is a limit to my curiosity," she replied.

"That's because you imagine the place is haunted, isn't it?"

"I haven't any opinion on the subject," she replied evasively.

"I've heard a whole lot about haunted houses, but I never took any stock in such things," said Joe. "I honestly think it's all rot. When a person dies it is claimed that he goes either to heaven or the other place. If that is the fact, and all the ministers preach it, how then can people appear on earth after their death?"

"It doesn't seem reasonable, but——"

"You have your doubts on the subject, eh? Now look here, I read a case in the paper a while ago where a family moved into a certain house and the first night they were in it they heard a noise like a body being dragged down stairs. They investigated, but could find no evidence that such a thing had happened. The phenomena was subsequently repeated, and they spoke to a neighbor about it. He told them that a man had been murdered in a room on the third floor and dragged down the back stairs by the legs by his murderer. They left the house in a hurry. Now what I'm getting at is, supposing the murderer, who was executed for the crime, and his victim did repeat the tragedy in spirit, how could they make the noise which was heard, since they no longer had any weight or substance, being merely shadows? It's ridiculous! So I say all ghosts are a humbug."

"That may be, but I wouldn't like to go into those tower rooms, especially at night."

"Do you dare me to do it?" said Joe.

"Would you?" she cried, looking him full in the face.

"I would, but I'd like you to go with me, so that I could cure you of your foolish notions about that wing being haunted," he replied.

"I wouldn't dare," she replied with a little shudder.

"Then I will go alone if you will permit me to, for I'm

curious to know what the rooms, the top one particularly, looks like, since they have been closed up for forty-five years at least."

"No," she said, "I don't want you to go."

"Why don't you?" he asked.

"I'm afraid something might happen to you."

"Don't you worry about that. I shall bring you back a full description of the turret chamber. Maybe I'll find the seven clerks up there," he laughed.

"It is nothing to jest about," she said earnestly, laying her hand on his arm.

"Or the seven bags of gold."

"You will never find any clue to the missing gold there."

"Probably not, but there ought to be many old-fashioned things up there that are worth bringing down, cleaning up and placing about the house as curios."

She shook her head as if she didn't approve of disturbing them.

He would have continued the subject, but at that moment the bell connecting the dining-room with the office was rung, which was a sign that Matthew Graves was ready to retire and wanted to go through the nightly counting of the seven bags of gold with his new clerk.

Joe jumped up, bade Edith good night and ran up to the office.

CHAPTER VI.

JOE INVESTIGATES.

Next morning after Joe had finished his toilet he walked out into the corridor and looked at the end near the office where the small door was that connected with the unused and alleged haunted section of the house.

That end of the corridor was so dark that he couldn't make out the door at all from the spot where he stood, so he walked down till he got close to the end wall, which, like the office, was paneled with dark wood, that had become almost black through age.

He was now able to see the outline of the door, which fitted quite snug, and was about one-third smaller than an ordinary door.

It was fitted with an old-fashioned glass knob, which Joe turned to assure himself that the door was fast.

The key, an odd-looking one, was hanging on a nail just within his reach.

Joe was strongly tempted to enter the place and explore both rooms, but hesitated at intruding where he had no business.

"I don't see that it would do any harm," he argued. "Neither Mr. Graves nor his daughter use this part of the house. If it was my house, I'd have the rooms cleaned up in a jiffy and make use of them. It is on the sunny side, and a fine view of the Sound could be had from the turret windows. I think they're the two most desirable rooms in the house. It's a shame to have them go to waste. They're no more haunted than any other part of the building. That's all moonshine."

Joe took the key down and looked at it.

Finally he determined, as the breakfast bell hadn't rung

yet, he could take a peep at the lower chamber, which had been shown to Edith and her father by the agent when they were inspecting the house with the view of purchasing it.

He thrust the key into the lock, turned it, opened the door and entered, leaving the door ajar so he could hear the bell.

The room was wrapped in a kind of twilight, owing to the fact that the windows were coated with dust and covered with a heavy, dark drapery.

There was light enough, however, for him to see that the room was furnished with a small, light table; four stiff-backed chairs; a small escritoire or lady's writing desk, evidently of foreign workmanship, like the rest of the furniture; portraits on the walls in heavy tarnished frames; a small, deep, open fireplace; a large, heavy piece of furniture which Joe, at first glance, took for a bookcase, but which he found on examination was intended to hold something other than books, and many other things.

Everything was thickly covered with half a century's accumulation of dust, though where so much dust could have come from puzzled the boy not a little.

He saw the footprints made by the agents, Edith and her father, but these did not extend far and looked like footprints in a light fall of snow.

Walking to one of the windows, he thought he'd let a little fresh air into the musty smelling place, but the moment he touched one of the heavy curtains so much dust was displaced that he changed his mind, as he did not want to appear at the breakfast table looking like a miller.

He was about to walk over to the winding staircase to take a look upward, when it suddenly occurred to him that he had broken a stringent rule laid down by Mr. Graves, which was that he must not leave the office untenanted for a moment.

"Gee! If the old man walks in there, and it's his time for doing it, and he finds me out, he'll give me a calling down," he thought. "I must get back and postpone my investigations till another time."

He made a hurried exit from the room, locked the door, replaced the key and returned to the office.

He was not a moment too soon, for he heard a door open and close and then the measured steps of his employer sounded in the corridor.

Joe ran to the window, opened the lower sash and leaned out.

At that juncture the breakfast bell rang.

Matthew Graves extended to him his customary greeting, which invariably included the query if he had slept well.

"Like a top," replied Joe.

He was then dismissed to breakfast.

Edith's sharp eyes noticed that there was a thin sprinkling of fine dust on Joe's jacket, and quite a patch of dust on the under part of one of his sleeves.

That satisfied her that the new clerk had been in the haunted part of the house, and she looked at him hard, wondering how far his investigations had extended.

She made no remark, but began to pour the coffee, expecting that he would bring up the matter during breakfast.

He didn't, and her curiosity induced her to question him.

"You have been on forbidden ground," she said with a half smile.

"What do you mean?"

"The evidence, in the shape of a sprinkling of dust, is on your jacket."

"I'm caught, am I? I didn't intend to tell you until I had explored the upper chamber," he said with a flush.

"Then you did not go up in the turret room?"

"No."

"When did you go into the lower room—last night after my father had retired?"

"No, this morning, directly after I got up."

She smiled.

"What are you smiling at?" he asked.

"You were apparently so anxious to go last night that I thought maybe you had done so, but I see you preferred to go in the daylight."

"I see. You think I was afraid to go at night. Well, I'm not, and to prove it, I'll go to-night."

The saucy smile faded from her face and she shook her head.

"Remember, you must not leave the office when my father is not at hand to take your place. Those are his orders."

"I know it, but what's the difference? Nobody is going to break in there during the short time I'll be away."

"You broke the rule this morning. You must not do it again," she said.

"All right. Then I'll go there during the early part of the evening, and I dare you to go with me."

She shook her head.

"Haven't you confidence enough in my protection?" he said, rising.

"Yes, but——"

"There ought not to be any but, Miss Edith. You ought to know that I would protect you against any danger with my life if need be."

After uttering those words in an earnest tone, he walked toward the door and dashed out into the grounds.

She followed him with her eyes until he disappeared, while her face flushed a rich tint, and she looked into her teacup in a pensive way.

What was she thinking about?

Joe walked around to the ancient part of the house and looked up at the circular wall, with its closed and silent windows.

While his eyes wandered to the windows of the mysterious turret chamber, Jerry came around a corner of the building, pushing a lawn mower before him.

"Hello, what are you looking at?" he said.

"Nothing in particular," replied Joe.

"Yes, you are," grinned the youth. "You're looking at the haunted rooms."

"Do you believe they're haunted?" asked Joe, eyeing him keenly.

"Sure I do," chuckled Jerry. "I've seen the ghost."

"You have, eh?"

"Yep," replied Jerry cheerfully, as if the sight of the spook had produced a pleasing impression on his mind, which was contrary to precedent.

"What did it look like?"

Jerry scratched his head as if considering the matter.

"It was a skelington in a long white sheet," he said with another grin.

"Didn't it scare you?"

"Nope. I ain't afraid of no skelingtons."

"When did you see it? At night?" asked Joe, satisfied that Jerry was handling the truth very lightly.

"Nope. In the daytime."

"Where did you see it? At the upper window?"

"Nope. It came out on that there balcony under the lower winder."

"What did it do?"

"It waved its hands and arms at me this way," and Jerry illustrated the movements of the alleged spook.

"Jerry, do you think I believe that yarn of yours?" said Joe severely. "If you ever saw a skeleton in a sheet come out of that window you'd make tracks faster than you ever did before in your life, and you wouldn't stop till you got on the outside of the wall."

"Maybe you'll see it some time and then you'll know I've told the truth."

He grabbed the handle of the machine and kept on with his work.

"I wonder why he told me that yarn?" thought Joe, looking after the youth. "I'll bet he's got some object behind it. He's rather a foxy kid. Maybe he is thinking of working the ghost racket off on me himself. If he does, I'll give him a surprise that'll make his hair curl."

Joe turned away and strolled off around the grounds.

CHAPTER VII

THE VISION.

Joe put in another week on his job, and Matthew Graves surprised him by raising his wages to ten dollars a week.

The old man appeared to be very much pleased with his work and seemed to have taken a fancy to him.

He had an easy time of it, for there wasn't a great deal to do, and some days he had so little to do that he employed his time reading a book from the bookcase, while his employer took a walk about his property.

Whether he had little or much to do, he was required to put in a regular number of hours in the office room.

Every night the formula of counting the seven bags of gold was gone through with and each morning they were taken out again and checked off.

The bags could have been counted and checked off in the safe just as well, but Matthew Graves would not have it that way.

It seemed to be an unnecessary feature of Joe's work, for the gold was always there, but the old man was clearly mad on that point, if on no other.

Joe made no further attempt to explore the haunted wing, though he was anxious to do it, as Edith appeared decidedly averse to it.

In fact the better acquainted she and Joe became the less inclined was she to have him venture into that section of the house.

She seemed to fear that some harm might come to him, though she could not give any reasons for her fears.

The decided interest she took in him flattered the boy, and he returned it, for by this time he was head and ears in love with her.

Joe had not been outside the grounds, except along the crack in company with Edith on three occasions in the evening since he began to work for Matthew Graves, and he was beginning to yearn for a more extended tour of the neighborhood.

He spoke to Edith on the subject, but she offered him no encouragement.

Finally he asked permission of his employer, but Mr. Graves turned his request down, saying that he did not wish him to have any communication with the villagers, who doubted that he had lost seven bags of gold, and said hard things about him with reference to the seven clerks who had preceded Joe.

As Edith did not go into the village herself, Joe presumed that the old man got his information from Jerry, who appeared to be the only person on the premises who was permitted to go out into the village.

He had to go anyway to purchase supplies, which was probably the reason why he was allowed out.

After Edith's experience with the savage bulldog her father did not try to get another, and this fact suited Jerry immensely, for he had been in constant fear of the late one.

So time passed and Joe had received four weeks' wages by this time.

As he had no chance to spend a cent, he felt quite wealthy with \$30 in gold in his pocket.

He felt that he needed a number of things, and he spoke to the old man about it, saying that he would like to run out to a store in the village and make his purchases.

"Jerry will get you whatever you need," replied Mr. Graves in a tone that satisfied the boy that his employer did not wish him to leave the place.

"This is next door to being in a prison," thought Joe as he walked off to find Jerry and commission him to make his purchases for him when he next went out. "It's a mighty soft job, but it has its drawbacks. As long as I stay here I suppose I've got to toe the mark. If I shook the place, I wouldn't find anything half so congenial to me, not to speak of Edith's society, which is more to me than anything else. I think so much of her that I should be awfully down in the mouth if I had to part from her. I think she cares some for me, too. At any rate, she acts as if she did. One of these days, when her father dies, she'll be well off, and it would be a fine thing for me if I could marry her. I'd be right in it."

It was Sunday night of the last week of August.

The day had been particularly sultry, and Joe noticed that Mr. Graves acted a little queerer than usual.

The heat seemed to affect him.

At ten o'clock promptly Joe entered the office room to go through his customary formula of counting the seven bags of gold at the old man's bidding.

After which, though the door was not locked on him, he was not to leave the room till his employer reappeared next morning.

Matthew Graves opened the safe and Joe took out the seven bags.

He placed them on the table and counted them slowly and deliberately.

Edith was always present at this ceremony, as it was her father's purpose to have her witness the proceedings.

She was not required to be on hand in the morning, when the bags were checked off.

The only occasions when he had called her into the room to witness the opening of the safe was on the mornings after the mysterious disappearance of the former clerks.

On each of these occasions the bags of gold which she had seen put back into the safe the night before were found to be one short, and her father called on her to take notice that he had been robbed again.

"There are seven bags of gold, sir," said Joe, repeating the expression for about the sixtieth time.

"Return them to the safe," said Matthew Graves.

Joe replaced them in the center compartment.

The old man then locked the same and tried the handle.

"Now, child, let us to bed," he said to his daughter.

At the door he paused just as he had done on the first night of Joe's stay, and turning around, said solemnly:

"Remember, young man, there are seven bags of gold in that safe—seven—seven—seven!"

He went out muttering the words.

"He's got it bad to-night," thought the boy. "I guess the heat has a depressing effect on him. 'Remember, young man, there are seven bags of gold in that safe—seven—seven—seven!'" chuckled Joe, imitating the old man's tone and manner. "I ought to be able to remember that fact, for I have counted them often enough."

He walked to the open window and looked out.

"Gee! It's hot to-night. It would melt the tail of a brass monkey. I'd give something to be out in a boat on the Sound. The water looks good, though it's as placid as a mill pond. This is just the kind of night to take your girl out."

Joe hung out of the window for a good half an hour trying to get cool.

Every once in a while a tantalizing little breeze would blow across his hot face and then die out, leaving him hungry for more.

At last, leaving the window wide open, he walked over to the sofa and threw himself on it in a lazy way.

He did not feel sleepy and had no desire to make up his bed and get into it.

His eyes rested on the door of the safe which was reflected in the light of the lamp, turned low, standing on the table.

His thoughts turned on the seven clerks who had held down his job in turn not much longer than he had held it, and who had each been found missing one morning, and with them had gone just one bag of gold.

"I'm no nearer a clue to the mystery than when I started in a month ago," he thought. "I guess it's one of those things that never will be found out."

After lying a while Joe concluded that he'd drag the sofa over under the window.

He got up, laid hold of it and pulled, but to his surprise it would not budge an inch.

He tried to lift it, but it wouldn't lift.

"It must be nailed to the floor. That's funny. I wonder why?"

He got the lamp and examined the legs of the sofa, which were elegantly carved in the fashion of the latter half of the seventeenth century.

There wasn't the sign of a nail in them, nor the least evidence to show what held them to the floor.

"It can't be its weight, for it would have to be filled with lead or I could work it around a little bit. This is the most curious sofa I ever saw. It isn't made of iron," he said, tapping it with his knuckles. "No, it's wood, all right."

He got up and tugged at it again, but with no better success.

"Well, something holds it, that is sure. It's too hot to exert myself any more now. I must tell Edith about it to-morrow."

He replaced the lamp and lay down again.

For a while his thoughts were centered on the sofa, and he tried to account for the way in which it appeared to be attached to the floor. Then he began thinking about Edith and what a fine girl she was.

Gradually he drifted off to sleep.

Then he had a curious dream.

He thought he was seated at his writing table by the window looking straight at the sofa.

The lamp on the table was burning dimly and by its light he saw a young man of perhaps thirty lying asleep on the sofa.

Suddenly something attracted his attention to a corner of the room.

The heavy curtain which hung there was slowly pushed aside and he saw Matthew Graves, attired in a dressing gown, with bare feet, enter the room.

He walked straight toward the sofa, looking neither to the left nor the right.

There was a fixed and glassy stare in his eyes, like that of a corpse.

His step was slow and measured, but his bare feet made no sound.

On reaching the safe he stopped, took a key attached to a ring and a chain from the folds of his gown, opened the safe door and stood contemplating the interior.

In some mystic way, not ordinarily possible, Joe seemed to see the interior of the safe, and following, through an impulse not his own, the old man's muttered count, saw that there were fourteen bags of gold in it.

This circumstance did not seem to surprise him.

Then Matthew Graves reached out his arm, seized one of the bags and took it from the others, placing it under his left arm.

He closed and locked the safe, tried the handle as was his habit, and walked slowly toward the wall against which the safe stood, between that article and the sofa on which the young man lay asleep.

A moment later a sharp click sounded that attracted Joe's eyes to the sofa.

He saw the piece of furniture drop backward, while the section of floor on which it stood revolved swiftly and noiselessly, as if on an axle, and a moment later the sofa was standing in its original position.

With this difference, however, it was now empty.

The young man and the clothes in which he had been wrapped had vanished utterly.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOE LEARNS MORE ABOUT THE OLD HOUSE.

Joe sat bolt upright and looked around him in a startled way.

The light burned dimly on the table and the room was just as it had been before he fell asleep.

"Gee! So I was dreaming," he said. "Well, that was the most realistic dream I ever had in my life. I saw the old man as plain as anything come into this room, go to the safe, unlock it, and take one bag of gold out of it. But there were fourteen bags in it, not seven. That was the number he had before he was robbed the first time. He looked awfully queer—just like a walking corpse. Then he went around by the side of the safe and then——"

Joe gave a jump and got away from the sofa.

"I saw that sofa revolve with a young man on it, and when it returned to its place it was empty, just as it is now. What in thunder does this all mean?"

Joe stood and looked at the sofa as if he were afraid it would jump at him and bite him.

After a few minutes of indecision he turned up the lamp and bringing it over near the sofa, got down on his knees and began to examine the carpet in front of it.

It was a thick, soft carpet that must have cost a lot of money when new.

It was not worn so much about the sofa as in other places, where it had gone almost threadbare.

Joe pulled at it here and there, but could find no evidence of a break in it.

It seemed to be perfectly whole all about the sofa.

"I guess there was nothing to that dream, and yet it is a most singular thing that the sofa is stuck fast to the floor," he said, evidently perplexed over the circumstance.

Finally he got up and replaced the lamp.

Hardly had he set it down before he picked it up again, and walked over to the spot where he had seen Matthew Graves, in his dreams, enter the room.

He pulled the curtain aside and looked, expecting to find a door, but there was not the slightest sign of one.

The panels were as regular there as elsewhere.

"That was certainly a crazy dream," he said.

He looked all around the corner, moving a heavy case of drawers into the corner in order to look behind it, and then laughing at himself for doing so, as there was no sign of a door behind it.

He left the case standing where he had shoved it and brought the lamp back to the table.

Then with a laugh at the ridiculousness of the whole matter he made his bed as usual and lay down with a light sheet over him.

He was dozing off when something aroused him.

He sat up and listened.

A noise of some kind was coming from the corner he had examined.

Suddenly an ornament that stood on the case of drawers fell over, struck on a chair, rebounded and rolled on to the carpet with a muffled sound.

Joe sprang off the sofa, seized the lamp and rushed over to the corner.

He picked up the ornament, which was an old-fashioned cup of sixteenth century workmanship, and listened.

Not another sound was to be heard.

After listening for some minutes he gave the matter up and replaced the cup.

"All imagination, except the fall of the cup, I guess," he said. "Probably in moving that case I displaced the cup so that somehow or another it afterwards lost its balance and fell. It must be so for it couldn't be anything else."

He returned to bed and lay thinking for some time.

Then he fell asleep and was not disturbed again, sleeping serenely till morning.

His thoughts immediately recurred to the events of the night—particularly his singular dream and the fall of the cup.

"Some people would have thought this room was haunted after that cup fell, and have got out pretty quick; but I'm sure it was all due to natural causes. The really curious thing was the dream I had. I can't understand the meaning of that. Dreams are said to result from the condition one's mind is in when you go to sleep. I went to sleep thinking about how odd it was that the sofa was stuck to the floor. That and my reflection about the seven missing bags of gold and the clerks who vanished I suppose got all jumbled up and produced the vision I had."

By the time he got washed up Matthew Graves appeared and wished him good-morning as usual.

Then the bell rang and he went down to breakfast.

During the meal he related his dream to Edith.

She looked a bit startled.

"You saw my father take one bag of gold out of the safe?" she said.

"Yes."

"What did he appear to do with it?"

"I couldn't tell you. He carried it around the safe, and then I saw the sofa revolve and the person on it disappear, clothes and all."

Edith appeared to take the matter very seriously.

"You say that the figure you dreamed you saw on the sofa was a young man about thirty. Did he have a small mustache?"

"Yes. And I noticed that he wore a seal ring on the little finger of his right hand."

Edith turned white and looked as if she was going to faint.

"Goodness, Miss Edith, what's the matter?" Joe exclaimed, jumping up.

She covered her face with her hands and made him no answer.

Joe was astonished and concerned.

"Say, tell me what's the matter, won't you?"

"Don't ask me," she replied in trembling tones.

"But I want to know. Why should my dream affect you so? You act as if you knew some one who looked like the person I saw."

It was some moments before she recovered her composure.

"No doubt you think me foolish, Mr. Eastwood, but you may understand my feelings when I say you have exactly described the first of the seven clerks who disappeared from this house."

"What! You don't mean it."

"It is true."

"How could I when I never saw him?"

"You could not have described him better had you known him. There were fourteen bags of gold in the safe the night he disappeared, and next morning when my father opened the safe in my presence there were only thirteen. One bag had vanished as mysteriously as did John Doane himself."

"John Doane! Was that the clerk's name?"

"It was. He was a very gentlemanly young man, and a good clerk. A singular feature of his disappearance, which was repeated with the other clerks, was the fact that some of the bedclothes he used were missing, while his coat, hat and shoes were found in the room."

"You never told me that before."

"I thought I did."

"I suppose you haven't any idea that sofa is fastened in some way to the floor?"

She shook her head.

"I have spoken about it to my father, and suggested that he send for a carpenter to detach it; but though he thought it strange he did not act on my suggestion. He said that the sofa was just in the position where he wanted it, and that it was just as well that it was stationary."

"Well, it was a funny dream."

"It was a most remarkable dream, and it worries me."

"Why should it worry you? A dream is only a dream after all."

"There are exceptions to dreams. Most dreams amount to nothing; but such a dream as you had last night has a significance that means something."

"You don't believe that what I saw ever actually happened, do you?"

"I'm afraid to give an opinion. I must think it over."

"It is nonsensical to suppose that a sofa in a private house would revolve in the way that one appeared to do. It would have to be constructed on certain mechanical principles, with a trap and other features that I am not familiar with, as I'm not a mechanic. Then what would be the object of having such a device in a house anyway? In any case, during the seven years you have lived here I should think you would have found out the secret of the contrivance, if it really existed, and done away with it."

"Neither my father or myself have suspected that there was anything unusual about that sofa except the fact that it was fixed to the floor," said the girl. "As you say it does not seem reasonable that it possesses properties different from any other sofa. Were it not for the unaccountable disappearance of the seven clerks from that room I would hardly give your dream a second thought. But the mystery that surrounds their departure, as well as the bags of gold that got out of the safe in some weird way, makes me feel nervous over your vision. However, it isn't reasonable to suppose that my father would visit the safe in the dead of night, take a bag of gold out of it and put it somewhere, and do that seven times and yet have no remembrance of the fact."

"No, it isn't, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Your father is a somnambulist."

Edith looked startled again.

"If he was I am sure I should have found it out. My room is next to his, and, as I have told you, I am a light sleeper. I would have heard him come out of his room some time or another, and as he has no reason to do that I probably would have looked out to see where he was going."

"Well, I don't see that this discussion amounts to anything, as it is founded only on my dream. That is really very little evidence. While it is true that once in a while people dream things that either have occurred, or subsequently do happen, that is the exception and not the rule. By the way, your father bought this house from the heirs of two old maids who had lived here for forty years, I believe?"

"Yes."

"He took it just as it was, furnished and all, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Then the old maids must have fastened that sofa to the floor for some reason. There is no accounting for what some old maids will do."

"I don't know," replied Edith.

"You've lived here seven years—the old maids forty, so they must have taken possession a short time before the War of the Rebellion. I wonder who lived here before that?"

"Nobody for about twenty years, during which time a woman of the village looked after it."

"How is that?"

"It descended from the Tory, who rebuilt it, to his son and grandson, both of whom lived here with their families, under the conditions of his will, which I heard was a peculiar one. His great grandchildren, who happened to be all girls, had a serious disagreement over the division of their father's property, and this house became a bone of contention which led to a long litigation in the courts. It was finally settled in favor of the two old maids, and they took possession, but it is said they never spoke to one another during the forty years they lived in the house."

"I suppose that accounts for the fact that the place is furnished in such old-fashioned style."

"Yes. One of the conditions of the Tory's will was that the furniture and fittings of the room which his wife, the lady who disappeared so mysteriously, occupied, was never to be disturbed or renewed."

"Is that so? Then that sofa, among other things, belonged originally to the Tory?"

"It did."

"Which makes it something like one hundred and fifty years old."

"It's as old as the rebuilt part of the house. All the furniture came from Europe, as did the carpets, hangings, and other things, and were of the best quality manufactured in those days."

"Your father could get a good price for them if he wanted to refurnish the house in modern style."

"Yes, but my father never will sell them. He prefers old things and old looks; that is why he won't have the house repainted and decorated. The chief charm of the house in his eyes is its aged and antique appearance. You

must have noticed that the books in the book-case are all old and out-of-print volumes."

"I have noticed it."

A part of the books were brought from England by the old Tory. The others were accumulated by his heirs. The most modern works are first editions of Cooper, Washington Irving, and contemporary American authors. Most of them are worth many times their original value to-day."

The conversation between Joe and Edith would probably have lasted some time longer only it was interrupted by the ringing of the bell pulled by Mr. Graves which called Joe upstairs to work.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE MAKES FRESH DISCOVERIES AND GETS INTO TROUBLE.

Joe had more than his usual amount of work to do that day, but notwithstanding that he found himself frequently thinking about his dream, and he wondered what connection, if any, it had with the disappearance of the seven clerks and the seven bags of gold.

At dinner Edith appeared unusually thoughtful, and had little to say.

Joe brought up the subject of the stationary sofa, but it was evident to him that the girl did not care to discuss the matter again.

In due time he returned to his work and was fairly busy up to five o'clock.

In order to put at rest the possibility that the sofa could be a revolving one, which seemed ridiculous, he went outside and noticed the position of that part of the office where the sofa stood.

That end of the room adjoined the ancient wing with its two unused rooms.

The dining-room was underneath the office, and Joe wanted to ascertain if it extended all the way under.

If it did it would surely settle the question uppermost in his mind in the negative.

Both dining-room windows were open and he could easily figure on the size of the room and observe where the wall at the eastern end came.

He soon saw that the office room extended beyond the dining-room wall at least eight feet.

The question that now presented itself was what was the intervening space between the end of the dining-room and the outside wall of the house used for?

It was too narrow for a room, and could only be utilized as a large closet or store-room for supplies.

Joe re-entered the house intent on investigating this presumed closet.

He knew it was at the end of a passage from which a door opened into the dining-room.

He went there and saw a door before him, leading into the place.

It was locked.

"I must get Edith to open it and let me see what it looks like."

He found the girl in the kitchen with the cook helping to prepare supper, which was nearly ready.

"I'd like to see you a moment, Miss Edith," he said.

She came over to him.

"Excuse my curiosity, but will you tell me what that place at the end of the passage adjoining the dining-room is used for?"

"It's a store-room. We keep flour, sugar, and such things there," she replied.

"Have you any objection to me looking at it?"

"Certainly not if you wish to," she answered in some surprise.

She got the key, led the way and threw the door open.

The place was very dark, as it had no window, but Joe noticed right away that it was not over four feet wide, and that its height did not extend up to the floor of the office-room as the dining-room did.

"I have been investigating this part of the house from the outside and it seems to me this store-room ought to be larger considering the space it has in which to spread itself," said the boy.

"I don't quite understand what you mean?" replied Edith, somewhat puzzled.

"Why, after deducting the space required by the dining-room wall and the outer wall of the building, there would still be six feet to be utilized for this store-room. You can see yourself that it is not near so wide as that. Between this wall," laying his hand on the side of the store-room and the outer wall is a space of at least a yard. Why did the architect waste that space? Look at the passage. It's easily six feet wide. Why shouldn't the store-room be just as wide?"

"I never considered that thing before," said Edith. "It does look like a waste of space."

"Sure it does. Now look how low the ceiling of the store-room is? Why should it be lower than either the dining-room or the passage?"

"I couldn't say why it should."

"There is no reason for it that I can see unless it was built that way for a purpose."

"Maybe that's where the beams run in that support the old tower part."

"That's true, but still I don't like the looks of that low ceiling."

"Why?"

"Because it's under the place where the sofa is, and affords the necessary space needed to permit the sofa to revolve out of sight if it was so intended," replied Joe.

"Are you sure of that?" cried the girl, grasping Joe by the arm.

"Quite positive. I have the position and measurements in my eye. I took them with the view of looking closely into the matter. I wanted to satisfy myself that the sofa was a stationary article in every way, instead of that I find ground for dark suspicion."

"Oh, Mr. Eastwood!" gasped Edith.

At that moment the cook rang the bell for supper.

Joe closed the store-room door, locked it and handed the key to Edith.

They entered the dining-room and sat down to the meal in silence.

The faces of both showed that their thoughts were of a serious nature.

Joe said nothing more about the matter, for he had

nothing more to say that would throw any further light on the subject.

Whatever his suspicions might be there was no use talking about them till he had more evidence to work on.

How he was going to get that evidence, if it existed, was a problem.

Nevertheless he was deeply interested in getting at the bottom of the matter.

His dream, if there was anything in it, suggested the solution of the mysterious disappearance of the seven clerks and the seven bags of gold; but the solution was too dreadful to contemplate without a shudder.

"In the first place, can Mr. Graves be a somnambulist?" he asked himself. "It is quite possible that he is. Walking in the sleep, I have heard, affects certain sensitive and nervous persons, often in conjunction with other nervous affections, and is said to be hereditary. If Mr. Graves is really a sleep-walker his daughter does not appear to be aware of the fact, so it strikes me that he can't be a real somnambulist, and that the affliction is of very recent date. Brooding over his money, even before he lost his first bag, may have brought it on. There is no way of discovering whether he walks in his sleep except by putting a watch on him. I must consult with Edith on the subject."

Thus Joe soliloquized as he was walking alone in the grounds after supper.

He walked to the postern gate, opened it and passed outside.

Then he directed his steps down the creek.

He had no special object in taking this walk, except a desire to be alone that he might ponder over the momentous problem that had now taken full control of him.

There was an old and disused boathouse on the banks of the creek about half way to the Sound.

When he came to it he went in and sat on an old box near the door.

"The somnambulist theory only applies to the seven bags of gold which the old man may have abstracted in his sleep, but it does not account for the disappearance of the seven clerks," thought Joe. "The question is does that sofa operate on a mechanical principle which causes it to revolve and dump whatever is on it into some underground hole? If it does, why should such a diabolical contrivance have been installed in that house, who put it in, and why did he do it? Mr. Graves certainly is not responsible for it, for the sofa was there when he bought the house. The two old maids couldn't have put it in, for I understand that room was locked up during the forty years they lived in it. Before they took possession the house was vacant for about twenty years. That brings us back sixty-seven years to the time of the old Tory's—by George! if anybody originated such a contrivance it must have been that old rascal himself. He appears to have been a hard case. The house was rebuilt for him, and that was the time when such a thing could have been put in. According to Edith's story, his wife disappeared in a mysterious manner from that very room—just as the seven clerks disappeared—and no trace was ever found of her. Gracious! Maybe the old villain had that sofa arrangement made for the purpose of putting her out of the way in a secret and effectual manner."

The very idea that he might have hit upon the truth fairly staggered Joe.

At that moment a heavy shower of rain, accompanied by wind, came up, and Joe, seeing that he would get wet if he remained by the door, took up the box and retired to a spot under the rude stairs that led to the loft.

Hardly had he seated himself again when he heard footsteps rapidly approaching the boathouse, and in a moment or two a couple of men rushed into the building.

"We're lucky to be so near this place when the rain came up, else we'd have got a good soakin'," said one of the new arrivals.

"Bet your life we would! Jim must have got caught in it, for he's behind time."

"That's his funeral and not ours," replied the other, pulling out a pipe, which he filled and lighted.

"Well, what have you picked up around these diggin's this afternoon?"

"Nothin'. What do you expect? Ain't I been investigatin' that old house yonder that we've decided to try and crack to-night?"

"It ain't taken you all afternoon to do that, has it?"

"Most all. I had to be cautious, for if I was seen snoopin' around the wall the folks inside might suspect that somethin' was in prospect. What have you done yourself?"

"Me? Nothin' at all."

"Nothin', eh? What are you kickin' about then? Expect me to do everythin'?"

"No. Of course not. I only asked you if you'd done anythin', that's all."

"I hear footsteps. That must be Jim with a wet skin."

A minute later a third figure appeared in the gathering dusk and dashed in at the door.

"You chaps are here already, I see," said the last arrival, taking off his jacket and squeezing the moisture out of it.

"We're here," replied the man with the pipe. "We got here just as the rain started in."

"I caught it good, but it won't last long, that's a satisfaction," said Jim. "You've been pipin' off the old house, haven't you, Bill?"

"That's what I was expected to do, ain't it?" answered the smoker.

"How does the land lie?"

"There's a ten-foot wall all around it with big spikes runnin' along the top of it, but we kin get over it easy enough by usin' a board to lay on top of the spikes."

"What else did you learn?" asked Jim, getting out his own pipe.

"I climbed a tree at one of the back corners of the wall and took a bird's-eye view of the house and grounds."

"Well?"

"The place looks seedy. If it wasn't that we know old Graves is wealthy, I would hardly think the old rookery worth the trouble of crackin'."

"It's worth it, don't you fret. The old hunk is said to be a miser and keeps his money in gold in the house."

"Gold ain't to be sneezed at," grinned Bill, "but I'd rather have bills if I had my choice. They say he's worth more'n a hundred thousand."

"He's worth enough to put us three on easy street if we can get hold of his coin. Go on with your discoveries."

"The winders were all open on the basement floor, but I could see that they are protected by iron shutters at night."

"Iron shutters. We needn't bother with them if we can reach the second flood windows. They haven't shutters, too, have they?" asked Jim.

"They have wooden shutters, but I don't reckon they're closed in this kind of weather."

"That's what I thought. How can we reach the second story?"

"It'll take a ladder."

"Ain't there any way of reachin' it without a ladder?"

"No. Well, come to think of it, there's a winder behind a low balcony at the corner of the house on this side. We kin get in there as easy as winkin'."

"That's the ticket. If it's got a wooden shutter we've got tools that'll make short work of it."

"That winder and the one above it are the only ones not protected by shutters in the whole house."

"That looks kind of funny."

"What's the difference if it does look funny so long as we get into the house that way?" said Bill.

"No difference, except that it looks like a piece of luck for us. Well, I've brought a candle and a deck of cards. It's after eight now. We've got several hours to put in before we begin operations. We can pass the time playin' pinochle. Where's that box that was here this mornin'?"

"How should I know?" returned Bill.

"Somebody has been here and either moved it or carried it away. Look around, Bud, and see if you can find it," said Jim, striking a match and lighting the candle.

The man addressed as Bud struck a match and looked around, but didn't see it.

Then he went over and glanced under the stairs.

He saw Joe Eastwood sitting there.

He uttered an imprecation and sprang forward, gripping the boy by the arm.

"Come here, Jim. I've caught a spy!" he cried.

"What's that?" exclaimed Jim, striding over to the stairs.

Bud dragged the struggling Joe off the box and out into the room.

The boy realized that he was in a bad fix.

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF HIS SCRAPE.

"Who are you, young fellow, and what are you hidin' in here for?" demanded Jim.

"I'm not hiding. I came in here to get out of the rain," replied Joe.

"Well, why didn't you let us know you were here?"

"Why should? What difference did it make to you whether I was here or not?" said the boy.

"It made some difference as you will find out. You listened to our talk."

Joe made no reply.

He couldn't deny that he had taken in all the men said and understood their proposed project.

He expected they would leave when the rain let up, then he intended to leave himself and notify Matthew Graves of the intended visit of the burglars that night and help him make preparations to receive them in a warm and unexpected way.

Unfortunately things were not turning out the way he had calculated on.

"I say you listened to our talk, do you hear?" cried Jim in a threatening way.

"I hear you," replied Joe doggedly.

"Why, don't you admit it, then?"

"What's the use? You say I heard you. You wouldn't believe me if I said I didn't."

"Of course we wouldn't. You couldn't help hearing us."

"What of it?"

"You know what our plans are for to-night."

"S'pose I do?"

"If we let you get away you'd warn the people in that house yonder and queer our scheme."

"Of course he would," put in Bill. "What's the use of shootin' off so much gab, Jim. We've got to fix him so he won't get a chance to blow on us. The sooner we do it the better for us."

Bud nodded as if he believed in Bill's suggestion.

"There's only one way of fixin' him and that is to bind and gag him so he can't get away, but to do that we need some rope. Where are we to get it?" said Jim.

"Maybe there's a piece in the loft," said Bud.

"Go up and see if there is," replied Jim. "You've got some matches."

Bud started up the stairs and presently returned with several pieces of hay rope.

"That's just the thing," said Jim. "Hold him tight while I tie his hands."

Joe submitted to be bound, for he saw he hadn't the ghost of a chance to get away from his captors.

"Take him up in the loft," said Bud, "and then tie his feet together."

Jim thought that a good idea and the men carried it out.

Joe was finally gagged with his own handkerchief and then left in the dark to ruminate over his hard luck.

Satisfied that their prisoner was fixed so he could not spoil their enterprise, the three rascals seated themselves around the box downstairs and started to while away time over a game of cards.

Joe could easily hear them talking and laughing, and he could see a faint reflection of the candlelight in the opening of the stairway.

After thinking over the unfortunate position and the probability of the three crooks cleaning his employer out of the seven bags of gold in the safe at one swoop, if they succeeded in getting into the house without alarming the inmates, he made a desperate effort to get his hands free.

He was not very successful, as the man Jim had bound him pretty tight, and the hay rope was dry and strong and didn't yield the least bit.

"I guess they've got me dead to rights," he thought. "If they succeed in burglarizing the house they are not likely to come back here and release me, so I'll have to

stay here till somebody comes along and frees me. I'm afraid people don't come to this shanty very often. At any rate, they're not likely to come up in this loft, so unless I could attract their attention some way I'd stand a good show of starving to death within sight of the house. I'd be the eighth clerk to disappear, and until my body was found I might enjoy the reputation of having broken open the safe and taken the entire seven bags of gold, together with whatever other articles of value the crooks got away with."

It wasn't a pleasant reflection and so Joe redoubled his efforts to free himself, but with no more success than before.

Thus time passed, and though the boy didn't know the hour, it was close on to the time when Matthew Graves required him on hand to count the seven bags of gold before he retired for the night.

Edith had long since taken note of his absence from the house, and she wondered where he had gone.

She walked around the grounds looking for him, and failing to find any trace of him, she hunted Jerry up and put him on the job.

Jerry told her he had seen Joe going toward the postern gate, so they went to the gate together and found it unbolted.

That showed pretty conclusively that Joe had gone out that way and had not yet returned.

"He must have gone to some place in the village in spite of father's objection to him doing so," thought the girl. "I can't say that I blame him for wanting a change. I've done all I could to make things interesting for him here, but, of course, he longed for fresh company, if only for one evening. He knows father will be looking for him at ten o'clock, so I suppose he will be back by that time."

Edith found the evening dull and tiresome, for she missed Joe very much indeed.

She was feeling depressed, too, over the suggestions that the boy's remarkable dream had given rise to, and this feeling was enhanced by Joe's remarks about the contracted size of the storeroom and the inference that might be drawn in consequence.

Ten o'clock came at length and Joe was still absent.

Matthew Graves presently rang the bell for his clerk, and Edith had to go up and tell him that Joe had gone out by the postern gate directly after supper and had not yet returned.

"Do you think he went to the village?" asked Mr. Graves with a frown.

"I have no idea where he went, father."

"Where else could he go? I am very much displeased to think he should have gone against my expressed wishes," said the old man.

Edith said that it was possible he had gone to the Sound instead of into the village and had taken shelter somewhere from the rain.

"But the rain stopped more than an hour ago," said her father.

"He might have lost his way in the darkness," replied the girl, doing her best to make the situation as easy as possible for Joe.

"Nonsense! Boys are not lost so easily. If he went to

the Sound, he took the path along the creek, and he could easily return by the same route."

"I'm afraid something has happened to him or he would be back by this time, for he knows you always call for him about ten o'clock."

"Go to bed, child. I shall wait up till he returns."

"Don't scold him, father. He will doubtless explain to you where he went and what kept him away so long."

Matthew Graves made no reply.

He walked up and down the room a couple of times and then sat down at his desk.

Edith finding that her father took no further notice of her, left the room and instead of going to her chamber, returned downstairs to the dining-room to await Joe's return.

In the meantime as the hours passed Joe fretted and fumed in the loft of the abandoned boathouse.

Downstairs the crooks continued their card game, smoked their pipes and refreshed themselves with nips from their pocket whisky flasks.

Midnight came and then the three rascals brought their game to a conclusion.

Joe heard them get up, kick the box aside and move around.

A board was pulled up somewhere in the floor and the boy heard something clink like tools rattled together.

The men then walked to the door and stood there a while talking.

Finally Joe heard one of them coming up to the loft.

It was Jim, and he held the candle in his hand.

"Well, young fellow, how do you feel?"

He spoke jokingly and didn't look for an answer, for the boy, being gagged, couldn't give it to him if he had felt disposed to do so.

The man examined the boy's fetters, and finding he was well secured, he turned away and went downstairs.

As soon as he rejoined his companions the men left the building.

Joe knew they had started for the house of Matthew Graves, and he gritted his teeth, knowing how impotent he was to interfere with the execution of their scheme.

The gag bothered the boy not a little and he determined to get rid of it if he could.

He rolled over against the wall of the loft and began rubbing his mouth against one of the rough posts.

The folds of the handkerchief were gradually pushed away from his lips on to his chin.

"If I could only release my hands as well I'd be all right," he said, but there was little chance of that.

Ten minutes passed away and then Joe heard two persons enter the boathouse.

The tones of the voices showed that they were boys.

What had brought them there at that time of night Joe did not stop to consider.

He thought he saw a chance to get free and so he yelled out:

"Hello, below!"

The boys stopped their talking and seemed startled at the hail.

At any rate they made no reply, so Joe shouted again:

"Who's up there, and what do you want?" asked one of the boys.

"I'm a prisoner up in the loft. Come up and cut me loose," replied Joe.

The boys held a whispered consultation, as if they suspected some trick, and then one of them mounted the stairs part way and said:

"Who are you?"

"My name is Joe Eastwood. I'm Matthew Graves' new clerk."

"How is it you are a prisoner up there?"

"Three rascally fellows caught me in the building during the rain, bound me with hay rope and left me up here," replied Joe.

"Come on, Dick, let's go up and help this chap," said the lad on the stairs.

The speaker's companion followed him up and they peered about in the darkness from the head of the steps.

"Where are you?" asked the boy who had done the talking.

"Over here," said Joe. "Haven't you got a match?"

"No. Got one, Dick?"

"Not a match," answered the other.

"I've got some in my vest pocket," said Joe. "Got a pocket-knife?"

"Yes."

"Get it out and cut the rope that holds my hands."

The two boys felt their way cautiously across the floor of the loft, guided by Joe's voice, and soon reached him.

"Here I am," he said. "Feel carefully for the rope and don't cut me."

The boy felt over his body and soon saw how he was tied.

"Gee! Those fellows didn't do a thing to you, did they?" he said, hacking at the strands of the hay rope.

"They did all they could to make sure I wouldn't get away, but thanks to your coming they'll get left. Thanks," added Joe as the rope parted and he got the use of his arms once more.

He struck a match and pointed to his feet.

"Cut my ankles free, please," he said.

His two rescuers were boys of seventeen and eighteen years of age respectively.

They belonged to a small nearby farm and Joe soon learned that their names were Bob Bradley and Dick Swift.

"You've done me a big favor, and I'm much obliged to you," said Joe.

"You're welcome," replied Bob Bradley.

"I might have remained here several days if you two hadn't come along."

"You might," said Dick Swift. "We just stepped in here by accident. We've been becalmed out on the Sound in a boat we borrowed this afternoon, and are bound home."

"Say, have you fellows good nerve?" asked Joe.

"Why do you ask that?"

"I'd like you help me catch the chaps who tied me up. They've gone to Mr. Graves' house and intend to break in and rob the place. Will you give me a hand?"

"Looks like a risky job," said Bob, doubtfully. "They might shoot us. Those sort of men always carry weapons."

"We must go cautiously about the matter," said Joe.

"We can get a good stout stick apiece from the woodpile and lay for them as they come out of the house. By rush-

ing on them unexpectedly we ought to be able to knock them out with a clip on their heads."

Bob and Dick, after some hesitation, consented to help Joe catch the burglars, and the three then left the boat-house and started for the old mansion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROBBERY.

Joe led the way, keeping a sharp lookout for the three rascals.

On reaching the wall they were not in sight, so the boy concluded that they had got into the grounds.

He walked up to the gate, wondering whether he should find it open as he left it.

He knew that it was Jerry's duty to see that it was kept bolted, except when someone strolled out that way intending to return shortly.

He tried the gate and found it unfastened, to his great satisfaction.

"Come in," he said to his companions.

Bob and Dick followed him in, and then Joe bolted the gate.

They walked slowly through the shrubbery till they reached the edge of the rear lawn.

There was a light in the window of the office-room where Matthew Graves' desk stood, and Joe guessed that the old man was sitting there waiting for him to turn up.

The light would probably cause the burglars to use more caution in their operations, but would not be likely to deter them from going on with their enterprise.

Knowing that the rascals had figured on entering the house through the lower window of the tower section, Joe piloted his companions around to that side of the building.

Joe soon made out that they had forced the window in question, and were, therefore, already in the house.

"They didn't lose much time in getting down to business," he said to his new friend. "We must look sharp or they will get away before we are ready to grapple with them. The woodpile is yonder. Come over and we'll pick out a club apiece."

There was no difficulty in finding suitable pieces of wood that would answer for cudgels, and thus armed the boys were ready for business.

At that moment a girl's scream rang out through one of the upper windows.

"That's Edith Graves' voice," cried Joe, every nerve in his body tingling at the thought of harm coming to her through the burglars.

His plans were changed in a moment.

"We must enter the house and protect her," he exclaimed. "Follow me."

He started for the balcony under the window through which the men had effected their entrance, but his companions hung back as if loath to take any chances against three rascals who were probably armed.

"Aren't you going to back me up?" he cried when he

reached the house and saw that the others lagged behind. "Here, give me a boost up on to the balcony."

Bob came forward and hoisted him up and he pulled open the window, which was one of the long French kind, extending to the level of the floor of the room, and was divided in two parts, each working on hinges, and dashed inside, without waiting to see whether his companions followed him or not.

They did not follow, for their courage was not equal to the emergency.

They stood under the balcony and listened for further evidence of trouble inside.

In a minute or two they heard the report of a revolver.

"Let's get away!" gasped Dick. "We're liable to be shot if those men catch us here when they come out."

"Come on," said Bob, and they started for the postern gate at a rapid pace.

In the meantime Joe crossed the dust strewn room of the tower section toward the door which he was satisfied that the burglars had forced.

He found it half open and the lock splintered by a jimmy.

He dashed into the corridor and made for the office-room, the door of which stood wide open, and through which streamed the light of the lamp standing on Matthew Graves' desk.

Looking inside he saw the old man stretched on the floor, bleeding from a cut on his head, received from one of the burglars.

The safe was open and the seven bags of gold lay in a heap on the floor.

These facts only attracted a momentary glance from Joe.

A more important matter engrossed his attention and aroused all his energy.

The three burglars had hold of Edith—one by each arm, while the third was gagging her with a handkerchief as she struggled in their clutches.

Without considering the disadvantage of facing three stalwart men single-handed he dashed forward to the girl's rescue.

"Leave her alone, you rascals!" he cried, smashing the nearest fellow in the jaw a clip that sent him staggering backward.

For a moment the ruffians were staggered by his sudden appearance on the scene, then they recognized him with not a little surprise.

"So you escaped, did you?" gritted Jim, ducking to avoid a blow from the boy's fist, and then seizing him.

Joe grabbed him around the waist and tripped him up on the floor.

Springing up the boy seized one of the bags of gold, intending to stun the fellow with it.

"Quick! Stop him!" shouted Jim, seeing his danger.

Bill drew a revolver and fired quickly at the brave lad.

Had his aim been true Joe would have been a candidate for an undertaker.

The bullet, however, just skinned the boy's skull, stunning him by the shock.

He fell like one dead, however, on his face, the blood flowing from the furrow made by the bullet, and Edith, who had got her mouth free from the handkerchief, gave another wild scream that rang through the old mansion, and still

further alarmed Jerry and the cook who were shivering with terror on the corridor above.

Jim sprang to his feet with an imprecation.

"We have no time to lose," he said. "Choke that girl off or her cries may put us in a hole yet."

He picked up the handkerchief and threw it around Edith's mouth, fastening it roughly behind.

Spying the bell cord hanging from the ceiling, he ran over, cut off a yard of it and tied the girl's arms to her side.

"Throw her on that sofa!" he said to his companions.

They obeyed.

"Now pick up a couple of bags of that gold each of you. I'll take the other three. That's as much as we can carry, and we'll get back to the boathouse as quick as we can," he said.

Bill and Bud seized two bags each and Jim grabbed up the other three, which he found almost more than he could stagger under.

With their plunder in their arms, they left the room by way of the corridor and reached the disused apartment through which they had entered the house.

Dropping their swag on the ground outside, they leaped after it.

Picking the bags up again, they started for the postern gate, which was the way they entered the grounds, for they had found it open.

Five minutes later they were outside making for the boathouse, unaware that their retreat was observed by Bob Bradley and Dick Swift, who were hanging around outside the wall.

"They've got seven bags of money," whispered Bob.

"And they're carrying them toward the Sound," replied Dick. "They must have a boat."

"Let's follow and see what direction they take, then we can tell the constable in the morning, and he may be able to catch them. We ought to do something to save that money," said Bob.

"All right," said Dick.

They followed the men along the creek and saw them enter the boathouse.

Creeping up behind the building, the boys peeked in through two holes they found in the rear wall.

They saw the man Jim light the piece of candle.

"That's the heaviest load I ever carried in my life," he said. "My arms are so lame I can hardly lift them."

"There must be a pile of gold in 'em," said Bill. "The two I carried felt like a ton by the time I got here."

"This is the swellest haul we ever made," said Bud, "and all in money, too. If it was only in bills we'd be all right, but how in thunder are we to carry these bags to New York without attractin' attention?"

"Easy enough," replied Jim. "We'll get a boat and sail there."

"Where will we get it?" asked Bill.

"About a mile from here there's a small sailboat moored alongside a private wharf. There is nothing to prevent us from takin' possession of it."

"Who's goin' to sail it? I don't know nothin' about boats."

"I guess I kin sail it," said Bud. "At any rate, I'll try

mighty hard for the purpose of gettin' this money safe away from these diggin's."

"As we ain't got no time to lose, you'd better go for the boat right away, Bud," said Bill.

"I'm ready to go, but you chaps must come along with me," said Bud.

"What for? Jim and me'll stop and watch the money."

"No you won't; you'll come with me," said Bud, "or I won't go."

"Why not? What's the use of us all goin'? We don't know nothin' 'bout sailin' a boat. Besides, the gold has got to be watched."

"It don't have to be watched. Nobody but us knows it's here. We kin hide it in that hole under the floor where we put our tools. It'll be safe enough till we get back."

"I don't see any use takin' chances when me and Jim kin stay here just as well as not," said Bill.

"Well, I don't like to put temptation in your way," returned Bud. "If I went off alone you two might sneak the seven bags off and leave me in the lurch—see?"

"We wouldn't do no such thing," said Bill. "We're pals and we stick to each other."

"Yes, I know, but I reckon there's more'n \$10,000 in each of them bags, and you two might forget all about me."

Jim put an end to the argument by declaring that they were wasting time to no purpose and that morning would soon be upon them.

"We'll hide the bags in the hole and the three of us will go for the boat," he said. "I guess they'll be safe. I don't see why they wouldn't be."

Bill objected to leaving the gold unguarded, but being overruled by his companions he reluctantly agreed to help stow the bags in the hole under the stairs.

"Nobody'll come this way before we get back," said Jim. "Even if some one did he wouldn't have the least idea that there was money hid under the floor. We will hurry. We ought to get back in half an hour or three-quarters at the outside."

The seven bags were hidden under the floor and the men departed at a brisk pace.

No sooner were they out of sight than Bob and Dick appeared at the door of the boathouse.

They had decided to take advantage of the chance to get the bags of gold away from the thieves.

"We'll hide them somewhere in the bushes where those fellows will never think of looking for them," said Bob. "Then in the morning we'll call at the house and tell Joe Eastwood about them. He'll be so tickled that he'll forgive us for leaving him in the lurch to-night."

After taking a good look around, they entered the boathouse, removed the loose plank and pulled up the seven bags of gold.

Then they replaced the board as it was before.

"Gee! They'll be plum crazy when they find the money gone," chuckled Dick.

"You bet they will. It will serve them right for stealin' it," said Bob.

They first carried the gold behind some nearby bushes and then looked for a more secure place to leave it.

They finally found a hole that struck them as suitable and carried the bags there and dropped them in.

Then they covered them up with a pile of vines they pulled up for the purpose.

"Now we'll go home," said Bob, and they did.

CHAPTER XII.

THE APPARITION.

Edith watched the departure of the thieves with the seven bags of gold in a state bordering on distraction.

She tried to free herself from the bell rope and in her exertions rolled off the sofa on to the carpet.

The handkerchief came off her mouth, and jumping on her feet, she ran out into the corridor and up the stairs to the next floor to arouse Jerry and the cook.

She found them both out on the landing at the head of the stairs, almost frightened to death by the report of the revolver, the screams of Edith and the general uproar they had heard below, the meaning of which they did not understand.

"Oh, what has happened, Miss Edith?" asked the cook. "Is anybody killed?"

Edith burst into tears.

"There have been thieves in the house. My father was struck down by them, and Mr. Eastwood, who came to my assistance while I was in the hands of the men, was shot by one of them and I fear killed. Oh, come downstairs at once. You must dress yourself, Jerry, and go for a doctor and the constable at once."

Then Edith asked the cook to untie her arms.

While Jerry was getting into his clothes Edith and the cook went down to the office room.

Matthew Graves was revived, but he seemed to have no idea of what had happened.

The crack on the head he got from the burglars appeared to have affected his brain, for the time being at least, and his thoughts were all muddled up.

Edith led him into his own room and persuaded him to go to bed.

While she was attending to her father the cook was looking after Joe, who soon came to his senses.

The boy's first thought was about Edith, and when he found she was all right he asked about the thieves.

The cook told him they had gone away.

A glance at the floor and into the safe told him that they had got away with the last seven bags of Mr. Graves' gold.

After sending Jerry on his mission to the nearest doctor and to Constable Brown's house, Edith returned to the office room and was overjoyed to find that Joe had recovered his senses.

"I'm not badly hurt," he said cheerfully.

"You're a brave boy to face those thieves single-handed," said Edith.

"I did it to save you, Miss Edith," he replied. "I would risk my life any day for your sake."

"You dear, good boy!" she cried impulsively.

"How is your father? Was he much hurt?" asked Joe.

"He received a severe blow on the head which has affected his brain a bit, but I trust the doctor, when he comes, will bring him around all right," she answered.

"The constable of the village ought to be notified without delay, for the burglars carried off all your father's gold," said Joe.

"Jerry is on his way to his house now," said Edith.

"There is nothing mysterious about to-night's robbery, and he'll have to get busy if the crooks are to be caught and the gold recovered."

Joe then told the girl about his unpleasant adventure at the boathouse with the three burglars, and how they had kept him bound and gagged for hours in the loft of the little building, and finally left him there.

"I would have been there yet only for a couple of boys who happened to drop in," he said. "They released me and I brought them here to help me put a spike in the rascals' plans, but they failed me when matters began to look strenuous, and I suppose made tracks for their home. Had they stuck by me we might have saved the gold."

The doctor came shortly and Edith took him to see her father.

The old man was sleeping peacefully, and the doctor, after looking at him, said he guessed there was nothing serious the matter with him.

"I'll call and see him to-morrow," he said, "and will examine his head then. What did you bandage it with?"

"I washed it in warm water. It was not a bad-looking cut, and I put a cloth, soaked with arnica, on it."

"That will do for the present. Renew the bandage in the morning."

"Now you must look at Mr. Eastwood's head. It has received the same treatment. His wound came from a bullet," she said.

The doctor fixed Joe up a little better and then took his leave.

Soon after he went away Jerry came back with Constable Brown.

Joe and Edith put him in possession of all the facts, and he said the burglars were undoubtedly New York crooks.

"I will telegraph their description to the city authorities right away, and detectives will be sent out to look for them," he said.

He hastened away to attend to the matter.

By this time it was daylight and all hands turned in for a few hours' sleep.

When Edith went in to see her father in the morning he seemed to be all right, except he had no recollection of the visit of the burglars.

She broke the news of the loss of the entire seven bags of gold as gently as possible.

He seemed stunned by the intelligence.

Edith tried to cheer him up by saying that the constable had the case in hand and hoped to catch the thieves and recover the money, but the old man found little comfort in her words.

He declared that he would wind up in the poorhouse now that he had lost nearly all of his money.

Joe and Edith were at breakfast when Jerry entered the room and told the former that two boys, named Bob Bradley and Dick Swift, wanted to see him at the front gate on important business.

"Fetch them in here," said Joe, and presently the boys came into the room.

"I suppose you're sore on us for not backing you up last night," said Bob.

"No," replied Joe. "I don't hold that against you. You both did me a big favor by releasing me from the loft of the boathouse, and I am grateful to you for your help."

"The burglars stole seven bags of gold from this house, didn't they?" said Bob.

"Yes. How did you know?" asked Joe.

"We were hanging around outside the rear wall when they left with the money."

"Is that so?" replied Joe, much interested. "In what direction did they go?"

"They carried the money to the old boathouse."

"How do you know they did?"

"We followed them there."

Bob then detailed how he and Dick had watched the rascals through crevices in the back of the building and heard all their conversation about stealing a sailboat and taking the money to New York by water.

He then explained how the crooks had put the bags of gold under the floor and then went off to get the boat.

"And what did you two do after they had gone?" he asked in some excitement. "Didn't you make an effort to save that money?"

"We saved it all right," said Bob.

"You did!" cried Joe, while Edith gave a scream of delight.

"If you'll come with us we'll show you where it is and help you fetch it back here," he said.

"I'll go with you right away. We'll take a wheelbarrow to bring it back in, for it's pretty heavy," said Joe.

Twenty minutes later the three boys with the barrow were on the spot and the seven bags were found just as Bob and Dick left them.

They were loaded on the barrow and the boys took turns in wheeling it.

Joe had just been telling his companions that that section of the house was said to be haunted, but that he didn't take any stock in the yarn.

Suddenly the long French window through which the burglars had entered was thrown open and a ghastly looking figure with a skull's head, and robed in a white nightgown, came out on the balcony.

"Mercy, what's that?" gasped Dick Swift.

There came a wild yell from the apparition on the balcony.

The boy with the wheelbarrow dropped the handles, and it turned over, spilling the seven bags of gold on the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SEVEN BAGS OF GOLD.

Joe was not a little startled himself for the moment, the apparition had appeared so suddenly, and right on top of his remarks to Bob and Dick about the reputation that wing of the house enjoyed.

Like a flash Jerry's tale of the spook he had seen come out at that window onto the balcony flashed across his mind.

"It's Jerry himself trying to give us a big scare," he breathed. "I'll fix him."

Grabbing up a bag of the gold he flung it at the apparition.

The bag hit the spook in the region of the stomach and it doubled up with a very human howl.

The skull became dislodged from its shoulders, and toppling over fell onto the railing of the balcony and rebounded into Joe's arms.

Joe held it up for his frightened companions to see, and then threw it back at the headless ghost, which was in the act of making its escape back through the windows.

The skull collided with the spectre's back, between its shoulders, and another howl was drawn from it; at the same time it lost its balance and went sprawling into the room.

"Give me a lift," cried Joe to Bob and Dick.

They boosted him up on the balcony.

He seized the fallen ghost and yanked it up.

Between the front opening of the nightgown protruded the discomfited face of Jerry Abbott.

"I thought it was you," laughed Joe. "You ought to have worked that trick off at night, and it might have gone better. Now you're found out."

Jerry sneaked off into the corridor with his nightgown and skull, leaving the door open at Joe's request.

"Toss me up the other six bags of gold, fellows," said the young clerk.

Bob and Dick did so.

He carried the gold, two bags at a time, into the office-room where the old man was seated with his daughter, who had told him that Bob Bradley and Dick Swift had saved his money for him.

His joy over the return of his money was intense, and the sight of the bags restored his recollection of the visit of the thieves.

He handed Joe \$200 to divide between Bob and Dick, and those lads returned home tickled to death at their good fortune.

At ten o'clock Joe was summoned upstairs by the old man to count the seven bags as he had been accustomed to, and then Matthew Graves retired for the night, and the house was soon as quiet as a churchyard.

Joe didn't feel sleepy and he sat for some time looking out of the window.

Then he began walking up and down the room.

He noticed that the heavy chest of drawers which he had shoved into the corner of the room on the night of his dream had been restored to its original place.

Evidently Matthew Graves didn't like the position of his furniture changed.

Finally Joe got a book, and bringing the lamp to the table beside the window, started in to read, and did not notice the lapse of time.

Although he had heard no sound, Joe suddenly felt that there was somebody in the room.

He turned around and was a bit startled to see Matthew Graves walking toward the safe in his slow and measured way.

After his first start of surprise Joe became as cool as an iceberg.

He saw that the old man was walking in his sleep, and he wondered if he would discover through his employer's actions the mystery of the seven missing bags of gold, as well as the fate he suspected had befallen the seven clerks.

Matthew Graves opened the safe, counted the seven bags of gold carefully, then took one of them out and closed the safe as it was before.

When he started around the side of the safe with the bag under his arm Joe was close behind him.

The old man walked straight to the apparently blank wall, laid his hand on a certain panel, and the adjoining panel slid silently aside, leaving an opening through which he passed.

As the panel slid back Joe shoved his foot in its way so it could not close.

At that moment a loud click rang through the room.

Joe turned and saw the sofa revolve.

"My gracious! so it does revolve in reality, and all the features of my dream have come true," he breathed.

Joe, however, felt that he must have a light to guide his steps, or something might happen that he wouldn't like.

Placing the book he held in his hand so that the panel could not close into place, he rushed over to the table and got the lamp.

Thus provided with illumination he entered the narrow space beyond the panel, and nearly stumbled over a narrow and almost perpendicular flight of steps that rose before him.

On reaching the top of the stairs Joe found himself face to face with a blank wall which barred his further progress.

"There's another secret panel here," he thought, "and I won't be able to get through unless I can find the spring which operates it."

He laid his hand on the nearest panel and bent forward to look.

He heard a slight click and the panel slid back, admitting him to the turret chamber.

He saw the old man kneeling down in a corner of the chamber, evidently looking at something and muttering to himself.

The bag of gold he had brought with him lay on the floor beside him.

Joe stepped forward and looked down over his shoulder.

His heart gave a great thump, for there, in an open sandalwood box, lay the seven missing bags of gold—the bags which had never been stolen by the clerks, as subsequent developments proved.

"The mystery of the gold is unraveled," thought the boy, following him back to the office, and then across the room to another panel in the corner, close to the chest of drawers, which Joe saw communicated with a narrow secret passage leading to the old man's room.

Next morning he waited for Matthew Graves to turn up as usual, but he didn't.

The bell rang for breakfast, and shortly after Edith came up to see why he didn't come down.

"I'm waiting for your father," he said.

She went to her father's room to see why he was not up.

A moment later Joe heard a cry of grief from her.

He rushed to see what had given rise to it.

"Oh, Joe, Joe, my father is dead," sobbed Edith, falling into his arms.

The old man had died suddenly and painlessly in the night.

Matthew Graves was duly buried and a will was found in the safe leaving everything to his daughter.

Then Joe told her of the events which had led to the solving of the mystery of the seven missing bags of gold, and he took her to the turret chamber by the ordinary staircase in the lower room, and showed her the eight bags of gold, which, with the six still in the safe, made up the original fourteen.

He removed them to the safe and locked them up.

Joe then told Edith that the sofa did actually revolve, and that mechanics ought to be hired to investigate the mystery of it.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the diabolical contrivance was built by the old Tory on purpose to make away with his wife, and her skeleton will be found somewhere under this building," said Joe.

"Oh, Joe," sobbed Edith, "if what you say is true, and the bodies of the clerks are found under this house, will not the stigma of murder rest on my poor father's name?"

Joe was silent, for he had not considered that fact before. But subsequently he learned that none of the former clerks were dead. Each in turn had quit the job in disgust when the old man accused them of stealing his gold.

"Well," he said at last, perhaps the best thing will be to put the sofa out of commission for good."

Joe took charge of the place under Edith's direction, for she was named the executrix of the will, and in time made a beautiful country property of it.

A year from the death of her father Edith married Joe and on the day of the wedding presented him with the seven bags of gold, worth \$70,000, that had been missing from the safe and recovered through his sagacity, and thus our hero became a rich boy, for he was also master of the house, though he didn't actually own it, but what was his wife's was also in a certain sense his too.

THE END.

Read "DICK, THE WALL STREET WAIF; OR, FROM NEWSBOY TO STOCK BROKER," which will be the next number (244) of "Fame and Fortune Weekly."

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GOOD STORIES.

N. H. King owns a remarkable English mocking-bird, which has established a reputation as a mouse catcher and takes the place of several cats. While King was in the field with the bird it caught ten mice in less than an hour, killing them all. King puts the bird in his barn at night, and says it is keeping it free from rats and mice.

The sight of two women passing in a sailboat the other day so excited twenty-one sailors of the German boat Hera that they hurried up the rigging in order to get a good view of the petticoats. Every sailor pointed his finger and made gestures toward the women, who answered by waving handkerchiefs. This was the first glimpse of a woman the sailors had had in five months.

The discoverer of the famous Welcome nugget has died in the Ballarat Benevolent Asylum, aged seventy-four. He returned to Ballarat three years ago poor and in ill health, and had to seek shelter in the asylum. The Welcome nugget, one of the largest pieces of natural gold in the world, was taken from Bakery Hill, Ballarat, Australia, in 1858. It was found at a depth of 180 feet. It weighed 2,217 ounces 16 penny-weights, and was sold for \$52,500.

While the two sons of John Rayner, an Illinois farmer, were digging a woodchuck out of his hole on their father's farm, they turned up an old tomato can containing \$300 in gold. The can had probably been buried for at least ten years, and the woodchuck had dug around it in making his runway. It was a great chance for him to take the money and travel and see the world, but he had not taken advantage of the occasion. It saved his life, however. The boys had got something better than woodchuck, and shouldered their spades and set out for home.

"In the Argentine Republic," says a writer, "where the summers are long and hot, it is customary to leave the windows open both day and night during the hottest part of the year. A bird, taking advantage of this, proceeded to build a nest in my room, fixing it firmly to one of the Venetian blinds over the window. The eggs were hatched and the young birds fledged. On taking down the empty nest I found it to be practically armorclad, the outer part being composed almost entirely of old rusty nails woven in among the hay. On counting the nails I found that no fewer than sixty-six had been used, besides some wire and pins taken from my dressing table. The bird was the size of a robin and very tame."

A pint bottle filled with rare old whisky, the age of which is uncertain, was found imbedded solidly in the heart of a maple tree almost four feet in diameter, growing in Bayliss Park, Council Bluffs, Iowa. President Graham of the park board concluded to cut out a number of maples planted more than fifty years ago, when Council Bluffs was first given a place upon the Iowa map. One particular tree that was in the course of a new path that was proposed was marked for the sacrifice. The choppers felled this tree, finding it solid from circumference to center. Sawing the trunk into four-foot lengths, eight feet from the butt, the saw just missed a long-necked black bottle. Observing it the choppers carefully hewed away the wood, when to their surprise, they brought forth, tightly corked, a bottle of one pint capacity, filled with liquor. The cork was removed and the odor of liquor became apparent. It was sampled by experts who pronounced it whisky of a most superior quality. How the bottle of whisky got into the center of the huge maple tree is a mystery that even the oldest settler is unable to solve. At no place about it was there any cavity and counting the rings of wood from the place where the bottle was lodged, each one of which represents a year's growth of the tree, it must have been there thirty years. Besides this, old settlers state that the bottle is of the type in use from fifty to sixty years ago. The bottle and contents have been placed in the public library as a curio.

JOKES AND JESTS.

"Why did that pretty Irish girl of yours hand her admirer a lemon?" "I think it was because he was an Orangeman."

Old Gentleman—Have you been to Florence, my dear? Young Lady—I don't know. In traveling it is my husband who takes the tickets.

Mother—Oh, don't you think we had better send for the doctor? Johnny says he feels so bad. Father—Oh, he's felt bad before this, and got over it. Mother (anxiously)—Yes, dear; but never on a half holiday.

"Your husband frequently misses his dinner," said one woman. "Yes," answered the other. "Whenever there is a ball game in town he devotes himself to finding fault with the umpire instead of with the cook."

"What is your idea of an ideal wife?" "One who will cook the meals, do the washing, look after the furnace, make her own clothes, and—and——" "And what?" "Keep herself looking as young and as beautiful as an actress who pulls down \$400 a week in vaudeville."

"Yeas, pardner," drawled the lean native with the huge yellow cornucob, "Bill was the unluckiest man in seventeen States." "Was, eh?" answered the man who was painting signs on barns. "Yes, sir. Why, when opportunity knocked at Bill's door he thought it was another bill collector, and hid under the bed."

"Have you discovered anything important?" asked the novice on the force. "Yes," answered the New York detective. "Then we shall be able to put our hands on the criminal?" "I am surprised to hear you talking this cheap story-book sensationalism." "But," faltered the novice, "you said you had discovered something." "I have. I have discovered an investment that will pay at least a hundred per cent. profit."

A FACE AT THE WINDOW

By Kit Clyde.

It was a cold, bright night in the early part of February, and the Limited Mail was speeding its way north. The passengers had settled down to a long ride, and had made themselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted. Those within range of the lamplight pulled out their evening papers and began the perusal of the rechauffe of the morning's news which they had already devoured.

"Not much in the papers to-night," remarked Mr. Barker to the company generally.

He was a stout, little gentleman, evidently communicative.

"What have you got?" asked his friend Smithson, who was sitting opposite.

"The Globe."

"So have I."

A stranger here joined in the conversation. He was tall and spare; he looked like the typical Yankee.

"Have you the last edition?" he asked. "If so, you'll find as pretty a little story on the third page as you'll meet with in a month's reading."

"The escape of that convict?" inquired Mr. Barker.

"Yes; he's a plucky fellow."

"He's a consummate scoundrel, at all events," remarked Mr. Smithson; "a well-known burglar, and more than suspected to have been a murderer."

"Yes, I'm afraid he's a bad lot," said the American; "I wish he weren't. If he gets away he saves himself ten years' penal servitude; 'twas worth the risk."

"How did he manage it?" asked Mr. Barker. "I haven't read it."

"Broke out of the prison van," replied Mr. Smithson. "Watched his opportunity and stunned the policeman inside, got the keys, let himself out, and bolted. It shows what a desperate man can do."

"Will they catch him?"

"That remains to be seen. The police are on his track," replied the American. "I should like to be there when they capture him."

Nothing could have been further from his thoughts than the possibility of his having to take part in the capture himself. The three men settled down to their papers again in silence.

"What's that?" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Barker.

"What is it?" inquired the others.

"I'm certain I saw a face outside the window," he replied.

"The reflection of one of us," suggested his friend.

"Perhaps 'twas the guard going by," said the American.

"If so, the guard isn't wearing a cap," said Mr. Barker, moving toward the window.

"Got it blown off, perhaps," said Mr. Smithson. "Pray don't open the window; we'll all be frozen to death."

But Mr. Barker let down the strap, and peered out into the darkness.

The engine was throwing up a shower of sparks, and the blaze from the fire illuminated the tender. Those windows which had no blinds drawn threw a dim light on the hedges, but otherwise there was darkness.

"Anything there?" queried Mr. Smithson.

"I fancy I saw something."

"Well, do settle about it one way or the other, and shut the window."

Mr. Barker withdrew.

"I'm certain I saw a man's head," he asseverated. "And I'm nearly sure I caught sight of something moving when I looked out."

"Hadn't you better call the guard and stop the train?" asked Mr. Smithson, ironically.

Mr. Barker did not reply, but looked uneasily into the darkness.

He had not been mistaken. A man, hatless and coatless, had passed along the footboard of the carriage. He had given a quick glance into the compartment, and, seeing it occupied by four men, had hastily passed onward.

The next compartment but one was labeled "Ladies," and was tenanted by one lady only. The convict, for it was he, stopped in front of this. With a dexterous movement he opened the door, and before the lady knew what had happened she saw a desperate looking ruffian standing beside her.

"Don't be frightened, miss," he said, "I ain't going to harm you; I've no time. I want some money. It's life or death to me, and I must have it. Your purse, quick!"

She glanced at the little handle which was the means of communication with the guard: the convict was standing between her and it. There was nothing to be done. She drew her purse from her handbag and gave it to him.

He put it in his pocket and in a moment was outside the door again.

Instantly she flew to the handle and pulled it with all her might again and again. Then the fright she had undergone overcame her, and she sank on to the seat, unable even to go to the window and give the alarm.

The convict had acted with the sagacity and daring which had made so many of his enterprises successful. He had calculated that his victim would give the alarm directly he left her. This was what he wanted.

It would have been madness for him to go on to the next town. He knew that men were on the watch at every station for him. He had mounted the train at the risk of his life as it passed slowly through one of the tunnels in the north of London, before it was free from the network of intersecting lines. He must somehow escape before it reached a stopping place.

But to leap from the Limited Mail meant probable death, certain disablement. If, however, the train could be stopped he might slip down unseen between the carriages and make his escape with a fair chance of success.

It is not usual, however, to stop a train on a signal by the communication. The bell aroused the attention of the guard, but all he did was to lean out of his window to see if there was any sign that it was necessary to do any more.

There was nothing to show that the ringing implied more than a practical joke, such as is sometimes indulged in by those who have subsequent cause to regret it. He was on the point of drawing in his head when he saw a white shawl being waved from a window. The lady had recovered sufficiently to drag herself to the side of the carriage and open the sash.

This was enough; the guard put on his break and signaled to the engineer to slacken. In half a minute the pace was palpably slower.

"What's up now?" exclaimed Mr. Barker, springing to his feet. The others followed him to the window.

They had not hitherto noticed the fourth occupant of the compartment. He was a well-built, tall man, but apparently very uncommunicative. He pushed his way to the window and looked out.

He uttered an exclamation, and to the surprise of his companions flung open the door and began making his way along the footboard.

The others followed his course in wonder. What did it all mean?"

He had seen the shawl hanging from the window. He knew to whom it belonged.

He was traveling north with his sister, and rather selfishly, though with her full consent, had put her into a ladies' compartment whilst he enjoyed a cigar in a smoking carriage. He had intended rejoining her at the first stopping-place. No wonder he was anxious when he found the train stopping and saw his sister's shawl.

The pace grew slower and slower. The convict bided his time. What was the good of hurrying? No one would care to follow him in the dark.

He had calculated without a knowledge of the circumstances. Half a dozen words told Mr. Fairbairn, the fourth occupant of the smoking compartment, what had happened to his sister. He looked around as she spoke, and distinctly saw a man drop to the rails from a carriage near the end of the train and make for the country.

Without a moment's hesitation he leaped to the ground and followed him. The Yankee was at the open door, a not uninterested spectator. Mr. Barker had seen the convict's escape and gave the alarm. In another moment all three were after him.

Mr. Barker and his friend soon gave up the pursuit. They were elderly and quiet business men, by no means fitted for a midnight steeplechase across country. But the American was stronger and accustomed to wild life; the excitement of the chase seized him, and he was soon close on the heels of Mr. Fairbairn.

Nothing could have surprised the convict more than the fact that he was pursued. He soon saw, however, that he was. He still had about him the weapon with which he had stunned the policeman; he determined to put it to further use as he saw Fairbairn gaining on him.

The country was too open for concealment, and the gray dawn was beginning to brighten the horizon. The convict grasped his weapon and prepared to receive his pursuer.

What would have been the result it is useless to guess: at any rate, Fairbairn would not have stopped. But the American caught him up and put his hand on his arm.

"Don't you go for him," he said; "it isn't worth while you're getting damaged. I think I can persuade him."

Fairbairn tried to shake his adviser off, but in vain. The convict was about to make a fresh bolt for liberty, seeing there were two against him; but the American's voice called him to stop:

"If you don't, I'll fire!" he cried, and the click of his revolver showed that his threat was not a meaningless one. The convict had no choice but to obey.

"Throw down that thing," ordered the American. He was obeyed: the short iron bar was dropped.

"Now march back to the train. No games, remember, or 'twill be the worse for you."

A few minutes later the convict was in a luggage van, securely barred in. At the next station he was handed over to the authorities for reconveyance to London.

Needless to say the American was welcomed effusively by his former companions, who congratulated him on his success.

"Well, perhaps it was not I so much as this little toy," he said complacently. "It's a bad habit I got into years ago when I used to live among a wild lot out West."

"Is it, indeed?" asked Mr. Barker, nervously, eyeing the weapon uncomfortably.

The American smiled, and there was a merry twinkle in his eye that suggested more than his words.

"Well, now that you come to mention it, sir, really I don't believe it is!"

MESSENGER BOYS

"Our boys are very frequently called upon for ludicrous services," said the superintendent of the American District Telegraph Company, "but the strangest call that has ever been made to my knowledge was that of a merchant who lives on — street.

"He is a stout, red-faced, good-natured looking man, with a funny eye. He called on me and said he wanted seven boys of different sizes for three days—that they must be prepared to live in his house day and night, so long as he would require them.

"What do you think he wanted them for? His wife had died shortly before, and his sister-in-law had written to him that she was coming to visit him. He was afraid she had a sinister motive in making the pilgrimage and intended to establish herself as housekeeper. To discourage such a proceeding he conceived the project of passing off the boys as his own family and having them make life miserable for her during her stay.

"Accordingly he made each throw aside his uniform and put on old clothes. A disgraceful set of brats they were when they received the visitor with dirty faces and clothed in rags. They played football with her bonnet, broke open her trunks and masqueraded in her silks, spoiled her cooking by sprinkling the joint with snuff, and played one hundred monkey tricks prompted by the merchant.

"They all got in a room over hers and maintained such a racket during the night that she could not sleep.

"When she went out to the street, the little imps formed in a ring around her and executed an impromptu war dance. Poor woman, how she must have suffered!

"She bore her cross patiently for two days, but there was an end to her endurance, and on the third evening it collapsed. She soundly cowhided one of the boys and took her departure in a rage, first giving her relative a piece of her mind regarding the young cannibals he was raising. It was no wonder, she said, that her martyred sister was in her grave, and she did not propose to be similarly tortured to death.

"The best of the joke was the children were palmed off on her as those of the merchant's first wife, while he had only been married once."

One of the boys is an intelligent-looking lad, with eyes as deep a blue as his uniform. His fair hair and full features left no doubt as to his German parentage. He said to the reporter: "We meet cranks, but some people treat us well. There's one young Irishman comes for me every Thursday to accompany him when he goes to see a German girl he's stuck on who speaks no English. I interpret between and don't laugh a bit when he says silly things about how much he loves her and how beautiful she is. He doesn't let me kiss her in German for him, though. She's a daisy, but he deserves her, for he's one of the best fellows in the world and gives me a dollar every time."

A lawyer's office-boy, who was formerly a district messenger, told the reporter that his case beat the deck. He said:

"It was a curious way of calling for a boy, too, for a telegram came saying that a messenger was wanted at a certain address on — street. When I got there a tall, thin old man told me that the people around him were trying to poison him, and that he wanted me to taste his food before he ate it—like trying it on a dog, you know. I didn't wait to hear any more, but ran home and reported at the office again."

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